GAMEINFORMER®

↘

**From our cover story:**

Evil Dead: The Game is full of scares. When the Demon dashes through survivors, they'll see a spooky image of a demon flash on the screen accompanied by a loud noise. Not only can this be disorienting, but it will also raise their fear levels, opening them up to possession and other nasty effects.

*Developed by Saber Interactive*

*Published by Boss Team Games*

EDITOR'S NOTE

# THE GAME EVERYONE IS PLAYING

**MY PHONE RATTLED OUT OF ITS SLUMBER AT 3:15 A.M.** It chirped noisily, letting me know I had just received three text messages within seconds of one another. Given the late hour, I assumed it was an emergency and hastily grabbed my phone from the nightstand. My friend Jason was desperately in need. His last message read, "Can I call you now?" I opened the text thread to gain more context behind his urgent plea and let out an audible groan when I learned he needed help in Elden Ring.

I don't think it's a stretch to say everyone is playing it right now. Most of my friends are obsessed with it, and a good number of the posts I read on social media are people talking about their Elden Ring journeys and conquests. I can't recall the last game that pulled in so many players. The fans were there on day one, but so were people who have never played a Souls game and even those who swore they would never play another one.

From the early previews, we knew From Software was working on something special. Dan Tack's review of the game confirmed that. He even went so far as to say, "it's my favorite game of all time." The universal praise from most outlets and the jaws it dropped when streamed by influencers created an enthusiasm that pulled in the masses.

What's truly incredible about Elden Ring is its freeing design creates unique adventures for every player, many of whom want to share their discoveries, victories, and uncertainty. It has become the most social game I have ever experienced in my friend and gaming groups – something I didn't anticipate yet love about it.

We're helping each other through communication and discussing the game on an entirely different level than we usually would any other title. As of this writing, I believe I am halfway through Elden Ring, and I don't want it to end – because I love the journey and how it's unified my friends in such a fun way.

I want more games like Elden Ring, but I don't think it will suddenly become the blueprint for other developers' projects. From Software has created a masterpiece that began way back when Demon's Souls was first getting off the ground. The culmination of ideas and iteration took numerous games to figure out and finally bring to market. Yes, we'll likely see elements of Elden Ring in other games, but there will only be one genuine Elden Ring. It's one of those rare moment-in-time games that we were fortunate enough to play when released.

There will be more games that pull us in, but this is Elden Ring's world for now, and I'm going to enjoy every second of it.

**ANDREW REINER**
*Editor-In-Chief*

**WHAT I'M PLAYING**
Horizon Forbidden West, Elden Ring, Tiny Tina's Wonderlands

**WHAT I'M WATCHING**
*From*, *Our Flag Means Death*

**WHAT I'M READING**
*Radiant Black*, *Captain Marvel*, *Detective Comics*

**FAVORITE BANDS**
Nirvana, Fugazi, Shellac

## EVIL DEAD: THE GAME

On March 10, we had a chance to play Saber Interactive's Evil Dead: The Game for around three hours, exploring the scary and sometimes wacky world of the popular horror franchise. Come explore the game with us in our 12-page cover story where we play as both the scrappy survivors and the cunning Demon.

Our cover this issue also features an augmented reality experience where you can explore Evil Dead on Snapchat, so don't miss out on that! Additionally, you can also try to grab a collector's copy of *Game Informer* Gold this month, featuring an incredible alternate-artwork cover with Ash Williams and a motley crew of Deadites. Visit GameInformer.com to learn more about the availability of this rare, collectible version of *Game Informer*.

# GAMEINFORMER

Volume XXXII / Number 4 / Issue 345

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Believes The Brave Little Toaster *is severely underrated*
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*Logged over 280 hours in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*

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*Spent 18 hours in line in a Best Buy parking lot so he could get an Xbox 360 on launch day*

**Our next issue launches digitally on 5/24**
**with the print edition to follow**

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## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

### Jill Grodt

**Associate Editor**

There's a redhead takeover going on in this issue's Staff Spotlight, and I'm happy to be leading the charge. Who knows? One day, *Game Informer* could be awash in a sea of auburn, copper, and even strawberry blonde. But for now, I'm content to shine a light on another carrot-colored creature. Tunic, and its vulpine protagonist, has me absolutely hooked. I'm not quite old enough to remember the days when players could only rely on a manual, playground friends, and their wits to beat a game. But Tunic made me a time traveler, and I love it.

### Alex Van Aken

**Video Editor**

Much like Starscourge Radahn from Elden Ring, I am burdened with the curse of a misunderstood identity. I am neither redhead nor a fair-haired blonde, but something in between. Following the same path as the Champion's Cub, I walk these desolate plains in search of higher places, not confined to the simple constraints of black and white. Just as the late general Radahn inherited the furious, fiery red hair of his father Radagon, I too emerged from my mother's clutches with a chin of flaming red. But I'm no redhead. No, I'm something greater.

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Naoki Yoshida has become an integral part of the Final Fantasy franchise. He looks back at his career with us.

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In anticipation of Evil Dead: The Game, we run down current asymmetrical multiplayer games worth checking out.

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Taking place around the French Revolution, Steelrising is a promising ultra-hard action game – with great art direction to boot. We got a behind-the-scenes look at the title.

### 50 **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE**

The 1990s are back in a big, bad way, and even video games aren't safe. We got a hands-off look at this retro-inspired beat-'em-up. What we saw was more than promising.

### 80 **TANGO GAMEWORKS: A DECADE LATER**

Shinji Mikami founded Tango Gameworks on the idea of giving younger developers the chance to direct their own games. More than a decade later, we talked to team members about how that mission statement is playing out.

## regulars

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COMING SOON!
Wonder Labyrinth
Road 96
Zombie Army 4 Dead War
Epic Chef
Chernobylite
Neptunia x Senran Kagura Ninja Wars
Skul The Hero Slayer
In Nightmare
GET 'EM ALL AT
GameStop
POWER TO THE PLAYERS
EVERYONE to MATURE 17+
E-M
ESRB esrb.org

# Replies

## FORSPOKEN

I grew up in the foster care system in New York City. Why is this relevant? Frey, the main character in Forspoken, is also from the foster care system in NYC. My jaw almost hit the floor when I read this in Kimberley Wallace's "All About Forspoken's Reluctant Hero" web article. I never thought my childhood would have a connection point with a hero in a video game, but here we are. Forspoken is obviously my most anticipated game of all time now. **– Victoria O'laughlin via email**

Forspoken's world, combat, and story all sound awesome, but let's have some real talk about the game's most important aspect: Frey's cat, Homer. Those cute black ears and vibrant blue eyes melted my heart. I can't wait to bond with him in the game. I bet he's the star of the sequel. **– Joe Raley, Tampa Bay, FL**

I know they say people shouldn't buy a book based on its cover, but I'm buying Forspoken just because I loved *Game Informer's* cover art so much! It's stunning. Please sell it as a poster!
**– Lewis Sanchez via email**

↳ *Many of us connect with game characters, whether it's a personal one like Victoria pointed out or one we forge as we play games. As stories continue to evolve in games, developers are doing a great job fleshing out characters, and giving players ownership over their actions. Even companions like Homer play pivotal roles in these journeys we take. And we'd love to make posters for all of our covers, but that sadly isn't something we are aiming to do at this time.*

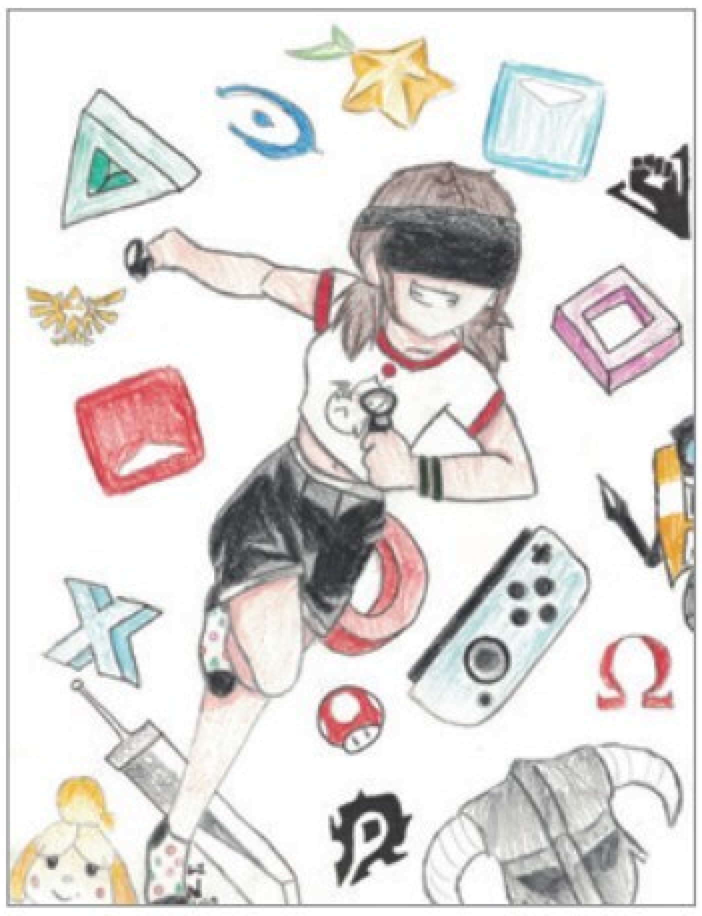
## MARIO KART 8

I'm very glad that Nintendo decided to make more Mario Kart 8 DLC, instead of a completely new entry in the series. People kept asking for a new Mario Kart game, but since the Switch is nearly five years old, I feel like it'd be a waste to make it now with a new Nintendo console coming in the next few years. If a new Mario Kart game did release on Switch, they'd likely port it to the new console like they did with Mario Kart 8 Deluxe, meaning less time being spent on new projects.
**– Getty Testa via email**

↳ *Nintendo's unexpected support of Mario Kart 8 this late in its lifecycle is terrific, but we don't think it's because Mario Kart 9 is being saved for Switch's successor. In a recent earning's call, Nintendo's president Shuntaro Furukawa said Switch is only at the midpoint in its lifespan. "The Switch is ready to break a pattern of our past consoles that saw momentum weakening in their sixth year on the market and grow further," he said. From these comments, and the frequency Nintendo releases new Mario Kart titles, we're due for a new one. Our guess is the next installment will debut on Switch.*

## ELDEN RING IS NOT FOR ME

I could never get into the Souls games, but after seeing it get a perfect 10 out of 10 score, I felt like I HAD to play it to see what you (and practically everyone I know) are gushing about. The open world is truly open, and ... well ... that's all I can really say I enjoyed about this game. It's still a Souls title at heart, and without level design direction I feel like it's more of a mess and even harder than any other title From Software has made. I'm not a fan, but I'm glad you all enjoy it. We all have different tastes, but this flavor is not for me.
**– Jayson Werth, Chicago, IL**



*Reader art submission: Mehriya Wilkerson*

*Reader art submission:*
*Sonya Hammond*

## HALO TV

I went into the first episode of the *Halo* TV series with clenched teeth and the low Rotten Tomatoes score in mind and ended up having a blast with it! Sure, it could have more to do with the game stories, but that's about as good as Master Chief and the Covenant are going to look.

I was surprised how gory and violent it was. They also made it feel fully sci-fi with aliens everywhere. I can't wait to see how this series develops. I'm glad season two is already on the way. That means they think it ends strong. **– Carter via email**

↳ *Seeing a character you've journeyed with for decades presented in a different way is always going to be alarming and hard to take in at first. We agree that Master Chief looks fantastic and it's nice to see the series getting a budget to bring out its science-fiction qualities. Many* Game Informer *staffers enjoyed the first episode and are hopeful the series will do the beloved franchise justice. It is worrying that one of the showrunners hadn't played any of the games, but it would appear 343 Industries has a big hand in its development with all the nods to fans seen in the first episode.*

## A READER'S TOP ROCKSTAR GAME

Red Dead Redemption. This game was absolutely amazing – the story, the gameplay, the ending – it would make a perfect movie as long as they didn't change anything.
**– Canadian Shogun via Instagram**

## Poll:

**Which starter Pokémon will you select in Scarlet and Violet?**

**SPRIGATITO – 32.4%**

**FUECOCO – 42.3%**

**QUAXLY – 25.3%**

*Poll conducted on Twitter on March 1*

## ELDEN RING IS GREAT

When I saw Elden Ring's perfect 10 out of 10 rating, I was skeptical, and this is coming from a huge fan of Bloodborne and the Dark Souls series. The reason for my skepticism was I didn't think From Software could make a much better game than Bloodborne in the Souls vein. I was wrong. Elden Ring blows away every From Software game. I agree with your rating and will even go as far to confidently say it's now my favorite game of all time. The exploratory freedom offered is unparalleled by any game. That truly felt like MY quest and not one where the developer was showing me exactly where to go. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild started this trend, and Elden Ring takes it to the next level. **– Blane Heeb via email**

↳ *With over 12 million copies sold within Elden Ring's first few days of release, we have received impressions from dozens of readers, and they are filled with praise and criticism. From Software's games aren't for everyone, but those who enjoy the Souls formula are mostly unified in their response: Elden Ring is something special and a game-changer for the genre. Could From Software create a Souls game with more universal appeal? Sure, but that move would likely destroy the core formula fans adore.*

*Reader art submission: Landon Jensen*

↘
**Join the conversation**

Send your questions, comments, and rants to Feedback@GameInformer.com

# Soundoff:

## Readers' Favorite Ongoing Games

We asked *Game Informer's* Discord community what ongoing games they continue to play. Here are some of their responses ...

I've been playing a ton of Rainbow Six Siege. Ubisoft has done a great job polishing and refining the game over the years, even for casual players. Looking forward to this year's season pass and new operators. **– JHerb24**

Definitely Destiny 2: The Witch Queen. I'm having so much fun with that right now – it's where all of my free time is going. **– Kody Gipson**

EVE Online (I've been playing consistently since it launched), Lost Ark, and Pokémon Go. **– Zachary Pligge**

None right now since Elden Ring has been consuming my entire life, but every now and then, I go back to MLB the Show. I'm pumped for 22, so that'll definitely take up all my time soon. I also just dipped my toe into Destiny 2 for the first time right before Elden Ring came out. Put about 15 hours into it, really liked it and I'll probably go back to it at some point.
**– Leafeon**

Final Fantasy XIV, Destiny 2, and Rocket League are my forever games. I may have to dip back into Grand Theft Auto 5. **– Ninja Master Dave**

### CROWDFUNDED

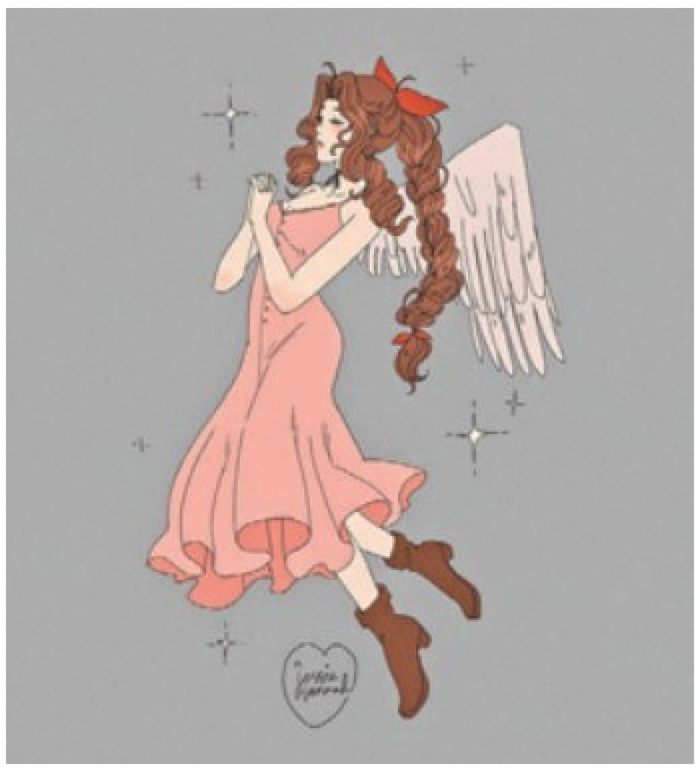
Most of the board games I buy these days begin as Kickstarter projects. If I back them, I usually get them a year before they hit retail shelves (if they even make it there). I've started to see toys and other items from big publishers go the crowdfunding route. For instance, Hasbro crowdfunds *Star Wars* toys, which seems odd to me since you know they are going to sell anyway. Could we potentially see Sony crowdfund The Last of Us 3? Are all companies heading in this direction? **– Grady McDowell via email**

↳ ***Hasbro's crowdfunding is often for larger products that normally wouldn't be made, such as Jabba's massive sail barge, which costs hundreds of dollars and would likely not fit on most retail shelves. Some established companies also crowdfund to create rarer items, such as Todd McFarlane's remastered Spawn action figure. We doubt crowdfunding will ever be used for something like The Last of Us 3 or any other major video games. Yes, we saw Sony promote Shenmue 3's Kickstarter at E3 years ago, but that was mainly as a way to promote a game players had been asking to see for years. Sony had little to do with it outside of that. Crowdfunding is an excellent way for smaller teams to get their projects made and likely won't be where big triple-A projects exist.***

### BEST YEAR EVER?

Could 2022 be the greatest year ever for video games?
**– T. Stople via email**

↳ ***We couldn't ask for a better way to begin the year than with Elden Ring and roughly a dozen other must-play titles released right on top of each other. But we still have a long way to go. Summer is looking barren at the moment. We also don't have any new consoles launching, which always adds excitement to a year.***



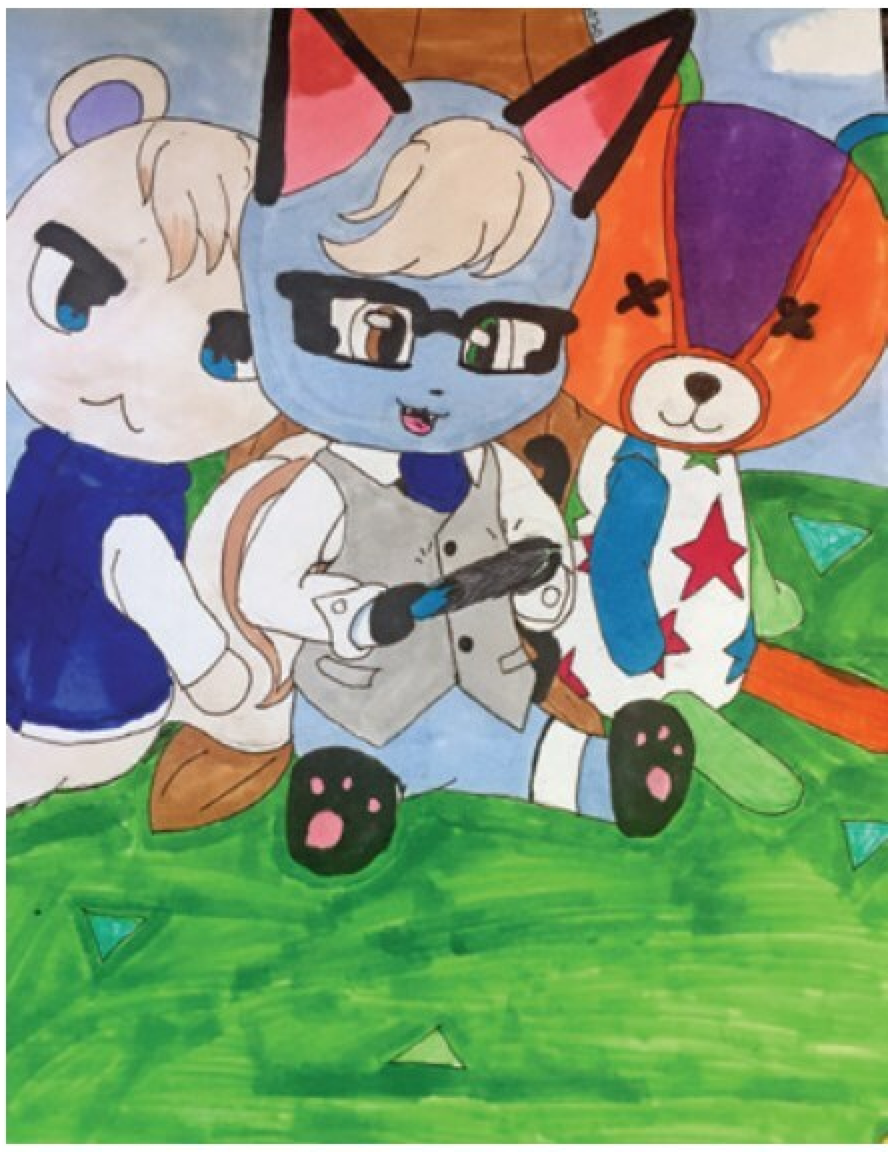
*Reader art submission: Jessie Hannah*

### A READER'S TOP FINAL FANTASY GAME

Final Fantasy VI has one of the greatest stories in a video game to this day. Still holds up, too. It's an incredibly well-made game that modern studios could learn from.
**– IG Gaming Official via Instagram**

### MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA FIVE YEARS LATER

This game was significantly better than people gave it credit for. It wasn't perfect by any means, but it did a lot more right than wrong. The combat was, without a doubt, the best of any Mass Effect game. Anyone who hasn't tried the game because of the internet hate should give it a chance.
**– Tomiseme123 via Instagram**



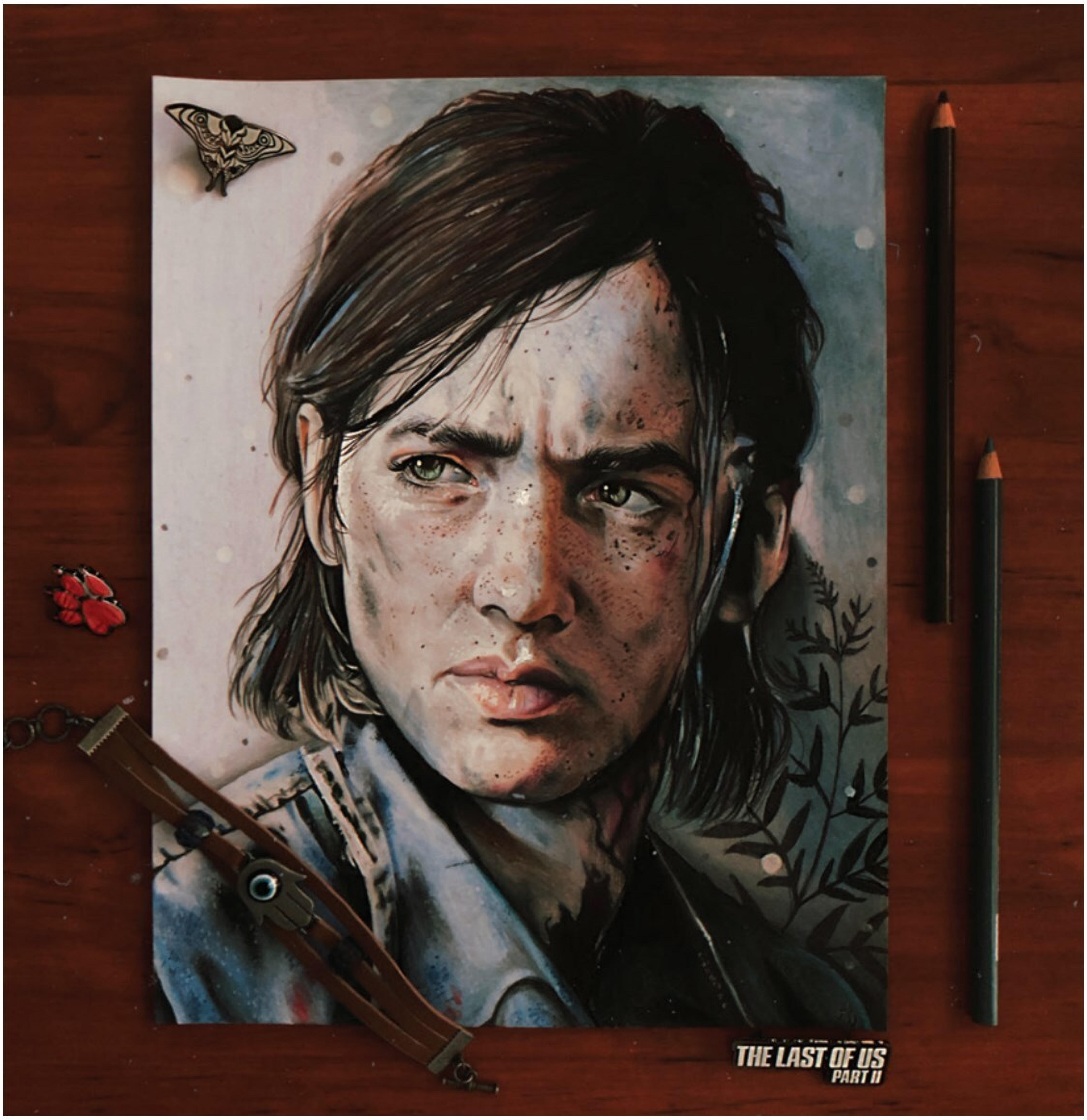
*Reader art submission:*
*Kayla Buttaro, age 13*

Reader art submission:
Madison Dean

## STARFIELD

Should we be biting our fingernails off worrying about the state of Starfield? It launches in November, and we haven't seen any gameplay from it yet! Todd Howard and his team at Bethesda keep making videos that only show concept art. The trailers are just CG movies that show nothing! I'm guessing this game will be delayed a few years. What is your take, *Game Informer*? **– Mark "Super Nervous" Segova via email**

↳ Game Informer's *staff has had this discussion a couple of times during meetings. Our takeaway: We're mostly panicking because Bethesda announced the game way too early (along with The Elder Scrolls VI). Most marketing cycles fall into the three- to six-month range now. Starfield's announcement dates back years, which perhaps shows why Bethesda is only focusing on concept art. Once we get closer to launch, we have a feeling we'll finally see gameplay. Given how far back the game's development stretches, it'll be interesting to see how last- or next-gen it looks.* ■



Reader art winner: Ashton Wood

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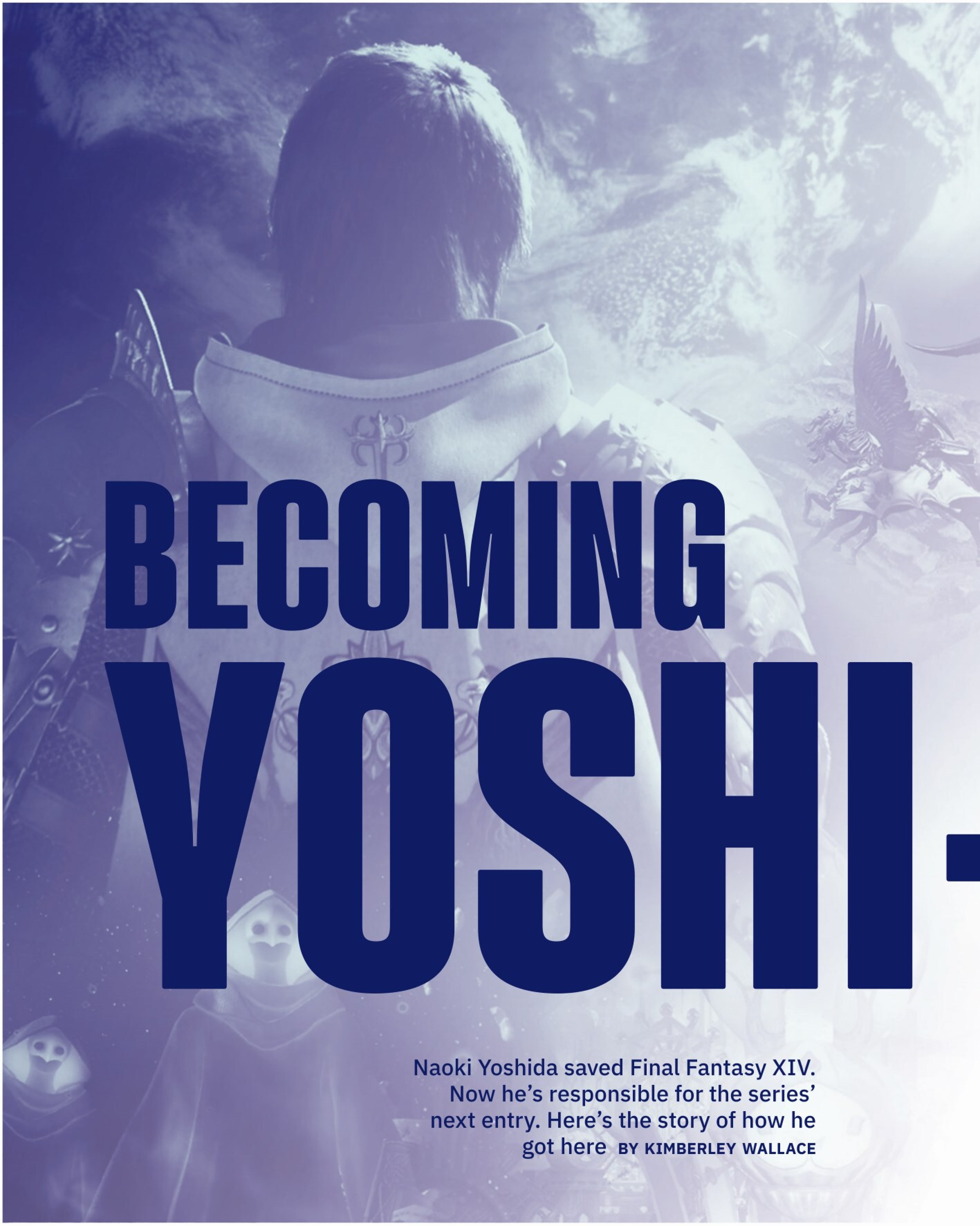


# BECOMING YOSHI-

Naoki Yoshida saved Final Fantasy XIV. Now he's responsible for the series' next entry. Here's the story of how he got here **BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE**

N

Naoki Yoshida is a man of many words. Ask him any question, and he'll answer in great detail. Which is terrific, because he's had quite the career.

There's no denying that Naoki Yoshida is a massively popular and important figure to the Final Fantasy franchise. When the series hit a low point, Yoshida helped turn its tide, most notably helping transform Final Fantasy XIV after its disastrous launch into one of the most successful and revered MMORPGs of this generation. Nearly a decade later, he's still finding ways to keep fans engaged with the content and returning for top-tier expansions like Endwalker. This consistency hasn't gone unnoticed. Just this year, XIV received awards from SXSW, DICE, The Game Awards, and Metacritic in big categories, such as video game of the year (SXSW) and best role-playing game (DICE). Yoshida is also serving as producer on the upcoming Final Fantasy XVI, making him responsible for ushering in a new future for the franchise.

Yoshida has rightfully earned his place on the pedestal, but he didn't get there by just being a smart and insightful developer. His genuine passion for games allowed him to look at things from the perspective of a fan, and it has made all the difference in his career. We discovered this firsthand in our in-depth interview, where Yoshida reminisced about his path to video games and shared more about who he is beyond the zeitgeist.

Yoshida shares a moment with the fans at Tokyo Fan Festival

## Finding Games

Yoshida is a storyteller, instantly grabbing your attention and making you hang on until his very last word. It makes sense that narrative and world building constantly come up when he refers to games. His love for story was fostered by his mother, who introduced him to mystery novels as a boy [see For The Love Of Mystery Novels sidebar]. Yoshida thinks every game should deliver some element of surprise, which he admits probably ties into his love of the mystery genre.

Ironically enough, Yoshida's first encounter with a video game was typical. When he was 5 years old, he discovered a Rally-X arcade machine while he was on vacation with his family at a hot spring. The game had players race through multi-scrolling levels to collect flags. "It was very standard, so that was not surprising in any way," he admits. "I was just there kind of playing around with the levers."

It wouldn't be until Yoshida was around seven years old that he really felt the magic of gaming, thanks to his neighbor, who Yoshida refers to as a "rich brat kid." Yoshida went over to his neighbor's one day and saw the NES hooked up to the TV, with the original Mario Bros. illuminating the screen. Yoshida was surprised by his immediate emotional response.

"That was my shocking entry into video games," he says. "At that time, I thought television was only to watch something – a passive media as we put it nowadays. The interactive element had such an impact on me."

Yoshida says even though Mario's mechanics were simple, stomping on Goombas and going through pipes, he was struck by the cooperative element and how that changes the experience, despite it having the same rules as single-player. "So when I got to play it for the first time, I already knew somewhere in my heart that I am going to be a person who creates games one day," he says.

But it took Yoshida time to warm up to RPGs. During his elementary and middle school days, he recalls playing a lot of action games and shooters, but his friends kept talking about Dragon Quest. Yoshida remembered feeling "rather negative" about the series. He hadn't played it, but based on what he heard, it didn't seem like his cup of tea. "It's this game where the CPU generates numeric random occurrences like dice, and I didn't know what the appeal was," he says.

That all changed when his friend lent him a copy of the game, and he came to a realization: "With these role-playing games, it's not about the skill of the player themselves, but I noticed that you have this character who gains experience, and there's a story behind it, and it was a very different experience."

About a year later, the original Final Fantasy came out, and it changed everything for Yoshida. "[That's when] I realized that this medium now tells a story and in a very dramatic way," he says. "It changed my perspective; I thought to myself, 'Wow, I want to be able to deliver a story through this video game medium to share with people out there in the world.'"

Yoshida always thought he'd make an action game, but his Final Fantasy experience made him change his vision for the future. His goal was now to make an RPG, and it was born from the desire to depict a story through this interactive platform.

### FOR THE LOVE OF MYSTERY NOVELS

When he's not working on games, you can usually catch Naoki Yoshida reading. His favorite genre is mystery, thanks to his mother collecting various Western mystery novels while he was growing up. Yoshida loved reading them and says there are way too many to list as his favorites, but singles out a few standouts, such as Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* and Soji Shimada's *Tokyo Zodiac Murders*. "The Sherlock Holmes series is definitely something that was very inspiring," he says. "I read through them when I was in elementary school, and it really got me intrigued in that genre."

Yoshida also fondly speaks about *The Kennel Murder Case*, a complex locked room murder mystery written by S. S. Van Dine in 1933 that was adapted into a film the same year. He says the depictions in the text still stick with him. "Sometimes it's just a very simple singular line, 'The dead body of Brisbane was laying there.' [Van Dine] didn't give a lot of exposition, but he described it so well that it's burned into my memory. I was in elementary school when I read this, and it still left an impact on my mind."

### Doing the Hard Work

Yoshida was dead set on being a video game developer, but as he was graduating high school, he started to realize he hadn't done much to put him on that path. "I never really studied any sort of programming or video game [design] at this point," he says. "I just had this weird confidence in me, thinking, 'Oh, I'm going to be a game designer one day.' It was just all talk at that time."

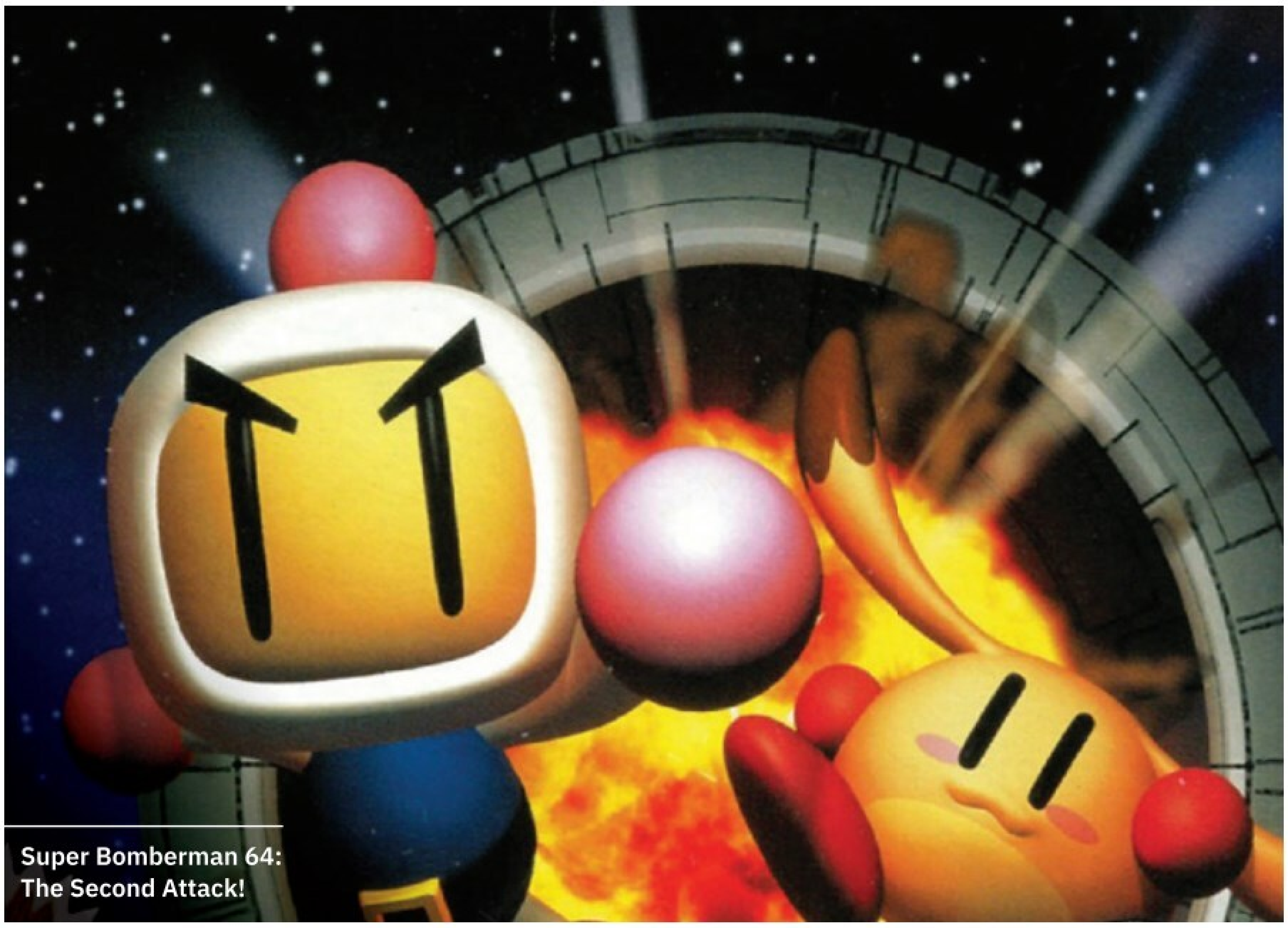
Yoshida then got more serious about pursuing programming and joined a game-design school run by Hudson Soft, a video game publisher that had its heyday from the 1980s to 2002, creating series like Bomberman, Bonk, and Star Soldier. This led to a part-time job at the company, which allowed him to get his feet wet in development. At the same time, the strategy/RPG Tactics Ogre came out, and it lit a greater fire in Yoshida to become a developer, giving him a new high bar to strive for [see Falling In Love With Tactics Ogre sidebar].

To get noticed, Yoshida upped his work ethic and changed his approach to game development. Games were no longer being made by just a few people; he was watching teams grow, with new roles opening due to new complexities in the hardware. Yoshida knew it wouldn't be enough to master one discipline; he needed to learn as much as possible about every aspect of game development. "I wanted to get experience in anything and everything," he says. "I would actively seek out tasks that people would not want to tackle themselves."

Yoshida targeted problem projects, where he noticed they had multiple director changes or the script needed a complete overhaul, and offered his services. "The reason why I wanted to do that is with game development, you do need various specialists, but there's usually only one person that supervises it all as a director," he explains. "And I wanted to get to that director position. So in order to do that, I wanted to gain the trust of all the people that are involved in the work. I wanted to get my foot in the door by having them open up to me and want to continue working with me." Yoshida said after a year, opportunities started coming his way, and eventually, he nabbed the role of story mode director on Bomberman 64: The Second Attack.

Yoshida's time at Hudson Soft also served as a great way to acquaint himself with PC gaming, where the company got its start before shifting to console development. "The team was so well versed in developing for the PC platform, and we also had a good internet environment as well," Yoshida recalls. He fondly remembers using his high-performance work PC to sneak in some gaming when he could, saying the team worked really hard but were also gamers at heart, so they played a lot of Diablo and Ultima Online.

This is where he became fascinated by online players, and it also helped to have programmers around him to explain things. Yoshida remembers playing the first Diablo and realizing gamers were cheating the system by casting spells in safe zones. He wanted to know how players were outsmarting the system, and his colleagues were quick to explain how they had exploited the game. He credits this time as helping him learn the working of online games, which would prove invaluable for his future in the MMORPG space.



Super Bomberman 64: The Second Attack!

## FALLING IN LOVE WITH TACTICS OGRE

Naoki Yoshida lists the tactical role-playing game Tactics Ogre as one of his favorite titles, calling it "a great inspiration" for him as a game developer. Yoshida points to the realistic storyline and how, up until that point, the RPGs he played were usually about one hero or a small group coming to save the universe. He liked the more intimate approach.

"Tactics Orge was a much more condensed sort of situation," Yoshida explains. "You were fighting for this ideology, this country, and this history that you are shouldering as part of this battle. It felt so real, because whenever we look at the world, it's actually kind of narrow-minded, because typically, you're just looking at things that are immediately around you. [Tactics Ogre] had those very realistic boundaries of [our] universe. Then the people inside of it were just so well developed, so intricately created."

Yoshida jokes that he was just this kid who thought he was going to be the next big thing in video games, but playing Tactics Ogre was a wake-up call. "By looking at Tactics Ogre, it just shattered my confidence," he says. "It was like, 'Wow, how could somebody make something so brilliant? And I have to compete against these people? I have to go beyond those people?' But at the same time, it also drove me to think, 'I would love to create games with people like that, so I need to get up [to that level]. I need to be able to compete, and I need to go above and beyond.' That was a goal that I set for myself."

## A Fateful Meeting with Enix

After gaining his bearings at Hudson Soft, Yoshida moved to a smaller company called Rocket Studio. Here, he was offered the opportunity he was waiting for: to make his own game. He would design the entire scenario, something he longed to do, for a PC RPG. Little did he know it would also cause him to cross paths with his future employer and an important man in the industry: Yosuke Saito, best known as the producer of the Nier series.

Yoshida met with a pre-merger Enix before its ties to Square to pitch his game idea. It got the greenlight. According to Yoshida, the RPG tapped into the multiplayer experience. "It had a scenario that you're following, but it was going to be set up so that you wouldn't be able to see all of the different branches unless you teamed up with somebody else," he explains. "So you would follow this one path, and then you'd have to team up with somebody else who has gone through a different history, or there was an item that you had to obtain in order to change your trajectory, but that item can only be obtained from somebody else."

In the middle of the title's development, Enix merged with Square, and things started to change quickly. "There was a lot of transition," Yoshida says. "Our project, which was supposed to be on PC, was told to also be developed for [PlayStation 2]. Then things just got messy, and the title was put on indefinite hold."

Not all was lost, though. Connections can be powerful, and Saito brought Yoshida into Square Enix as a full-time employee when he asked him to help with the Dragon Quest series in 2005. Yes, the juggernaut franchise Yoshida didn't initially gravitate toward as a kid ended up becoming a huge part of his career. Yoshida worked on arcade games for the franchise, but his main project was Dragon Quest X – the first MMORPG for the beloved property. Saito served as Dragon Quest X's producer and made Yoshida its chief planner.

Yoshida does special 14-hour livestreams to interact with the fans

Saito saw Yoshida's potential early on and still has much respect for how he approaches his work. "I have always related to Yoshi-P's 'I love games!' sentiment, and there are many things I respect him for, regardless of the senior-junior relationship," Saito says. "There are many important aspects when developing a video game, but in the end, it all comes down to love. I think the best thing about him is that you can clearly see that he puts all his energy into a project with that love, both from the perspective of a developer and as a player."

Yoshida's work on Dragon Quest X got him experience working on a top Square Enix property and an MMORPG. Looking back on his time leading up to Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn, the game that would eventually put his name into the limelight, he laughs, saying it was "a lot of game development and playing a lot of online games, which doesn't seem to be too different from what it is now."

## The Final Fantasy XIV Glory

When Final Fantasy XIV originally launched in 2010, it was met with intense criticism from fans and media, earning an abysmal 49 on Metacritic. The MMORPG had issues in every direction, from server stability to a bad user interface to laughable bugs. When the brand was at its lowest and XIV looked unsalvageable, Yoshida was brought in to take the reins. To say Yoshida had a challenge ahead is an understatement, and his failure could have easily ended his career, but he approached it the way he does everything, with hard work, brutal honesty, and undeniable style. Final Fantasy XIV was the birth of the "Yoshi-P" moniker, a nod to his power as its producer and director. In many ways, it turned the mostly unknown developer into a legend among fans.

Yoshida didn't earn the fanfare just for his success, but for how he embraced player feedback and was transparently open – something Square Enix wasn't exactly known for at the time. "The original Final Fantasy XIV and its failure had a big impact," Yoshida says. "This is just my perspective, but I feel there was a separation between the people who make the games and the people who play the games. I feel like trying to rebuild XIV was a turning point where I did sense that the atmosphere shifted to focus on trying to regain fans' trust."

Once Yoshida took over the project, he felt like he was able to put his own personal philosophies into effect.

As a gamer himself, he disliked what he saw as a divide between developer and fans – instead of working against each other, they should be working together. "I tried to be as honest and as transparent as possible to the players so that we would gain a mutual understanding," he says. To achieve this, Yoshida releases "Letter from the Producer Live" broadcasts where he candidly replies to fans and details the changes coming to the MMORPG.

Yoshida says he considers the players his allies and always wants to know what they want. In return, he tries to be as honest as possible, explaining the reasoning behind why a request or feature is feasible or not. He credits this approach with helping the MMORPG build the tight-knit community it's known for. "Yoshida-san is a very thoughtful person," says Final Fantasy XIV global community producer Toshio Murouchi, who has worked alongside Yoshida for the past 12 years. "He is a person who values the perspective of the players and the fans, and I really respect that he is clear and decisive about what may not work and takes the time to carefully explain why."

With nearly a decade of running the Final Fantasy XIV ship and four expansions under his belt, Yoshida thinks the MMORPG still has plenty of places to explore, teasing the numerous possibilities: "We know that we are in planet Etheirys, and we've only really explored about a third of that. And then, of course, with the Source's reflections, we've only visited the First out of the 13 different mirrored worlds. Even if we have time travel, we've never gone to the future yet. Who knows? This may have actually been a multiverse."

Final Fantasy XIV

## A Future Fantasy

A lot has changed for Yoshida since he first landed at Square Enix, not just in terms of his success and the company itself, but also in the gaming industry as a whole. Technology continues to advance, and Yoshida notes how the higher processing power and performance levels have taken the medium to a new level. Yoshida points to the realism that video games can now achieve, saying players no longer have to fill in the gaps of their imaginations when playing. It's also upped the expectations and pressure to get every cinematic shot just right.

"The costs and the resources required for producing a modern game have become a lot more expensive, and the technology that sits behind developing these games have come to the point of scholarly levels," Yoshida says. "I'm working on Final Fantasy XVI, and sometimes I look at what we're trying to do and I think to myself, 'Wouldn't this be quicker and cheaper if we just film real people?'"

Part of why Yoshida is so good at what he does is he's always paying attention and analyzing everything around him. He points to the internet as something that has continued to play a large role in how we experience games. "The internet, in general, has become such a part of our lives that we don't really think about connecting to the internet; it's already [our] default," he says. "A lot of the things that we utilize in our daily lives are just already working under the assumption that we are connected online somehow, and it's sort of blurred the line between a physical place in a physical time and made everything more available outside of what we would normally be used to. That's also made an impact on how we look at games as well."

Yoshida's role has also expanded. He's still leading Final Fantasy XIV, but also serving as producer on Final Fantasy XVI, an important next entry in a series just beginning to regain its limelight after a difficult patch. Yoshida doesn't mince words about the challenges of having two big titles on his plate. "It's just so many things that I have to juggle, and I'm trying not to drop the ball, so when asked if it's smooth sailing, I would assure you it is not smooth at all."

However, Yoshida hasn't shifted his strategy from years ago when he worked at Hudson Soft, saying it all comes down to mutual trust between him and his team. He says part of his job is to challenge them to be confident in their decisions, saying success comes down to hard work and partly luck. He urges his team to have solid reasoning behind every choice they make. "I want them to have some kind of belief behind what they're trying to pitch," he explains. "If they have a risk assessment that they've done and they have evidence that proves to them that they feel comfortable in moving forward in a certain direction, I want to know that. I want them to be comfortable with what decision they've come down to and be able to back that up."

Yoshida plans to tackle the future with the same fearlessness he's always had in his career. When asked about Final Fantasy XVI, his answer echoes this spirit and his desire for all games to have the element of surprise like in the mystery novels he loves to read. "This applies to both XIV and XVI, but I want us to continue to push ourselves and take on new challenges with our approach," he says. "We want to bring a varied sense of fun and good gameplay as well as elements of surprise that would make the challenges we take worthwhile. At the same time, taking on a challenge is accompanied by risk. We may stumble, but I think being afraid of these kinds of risks and not taking the challenge is going to be disadvantageous to the players in the end. Not taking a risk might mean you see a game that has already been done before."

And, of course, before we close out the interview, Yoshida continues his philosophy of involving the fans in the game development process, stating: "We would love for people to join us in this endeavor. We'll cry and laugh together through this adventure. And hopefully, it'll be a worthwhile adventure in the end." ■

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR DYING LIGHT 2?

## The hit sequel charts a course for future DLC

**BY WESLEY LEBLANC**

**DYING LIGHT 2 WAS RELEASED IN FEBRUARY,** and by all accounts, it's a massive success for developer Techland. It remains one of the highest-scoring games *Game Informer* has reviewed in 2022, and its first weekend had more than 3 million players jump into Villedor. With it now in players' hands, the team crossed over from nervous pre-launch anticipation into elation.

"I think everyone is really, really happy that we were able to release the game," lead designer Tymon Smektała says. "It really took the best of us, but we are happy it's out there, and we are feeding on the positive feedback that the community is giving us."

Techland has a five-year DLC plan for Dying Light 2, but Smektała says the team will add more content than what's been announced. When the studio decided it would support Dying Light 2 long after launch, it felt frozen at times, he says. But it was equally as encouraging because the team knew that if the content was there, the community would show up, just as it did with Dying Light.

With launch day behind Techland, Smektała says the biggest surprise was how quickly some players could play hundreds of hours. Just as surprising was the speed at which requests for new content rolled in. Some of the biggest requests the developers heard include a New Game Plus mode, a Photo Mode, and additional tiers of difficulty, which Smektała says are things "that are on the table currently."

One challenge Techland faces is finding a way to satisfy every part of the fanbase. That challenge is what the next five years of Dying Light 2 are about, but Techland is currently very focused on Year One.

In broad strokes, he says the first year of content will encompass online play, single-player content, including story DLC, and more, such as parkour and combat-focused updates. Smektała hopes everything planned for Dying Light 2 is, above all else, surprising.

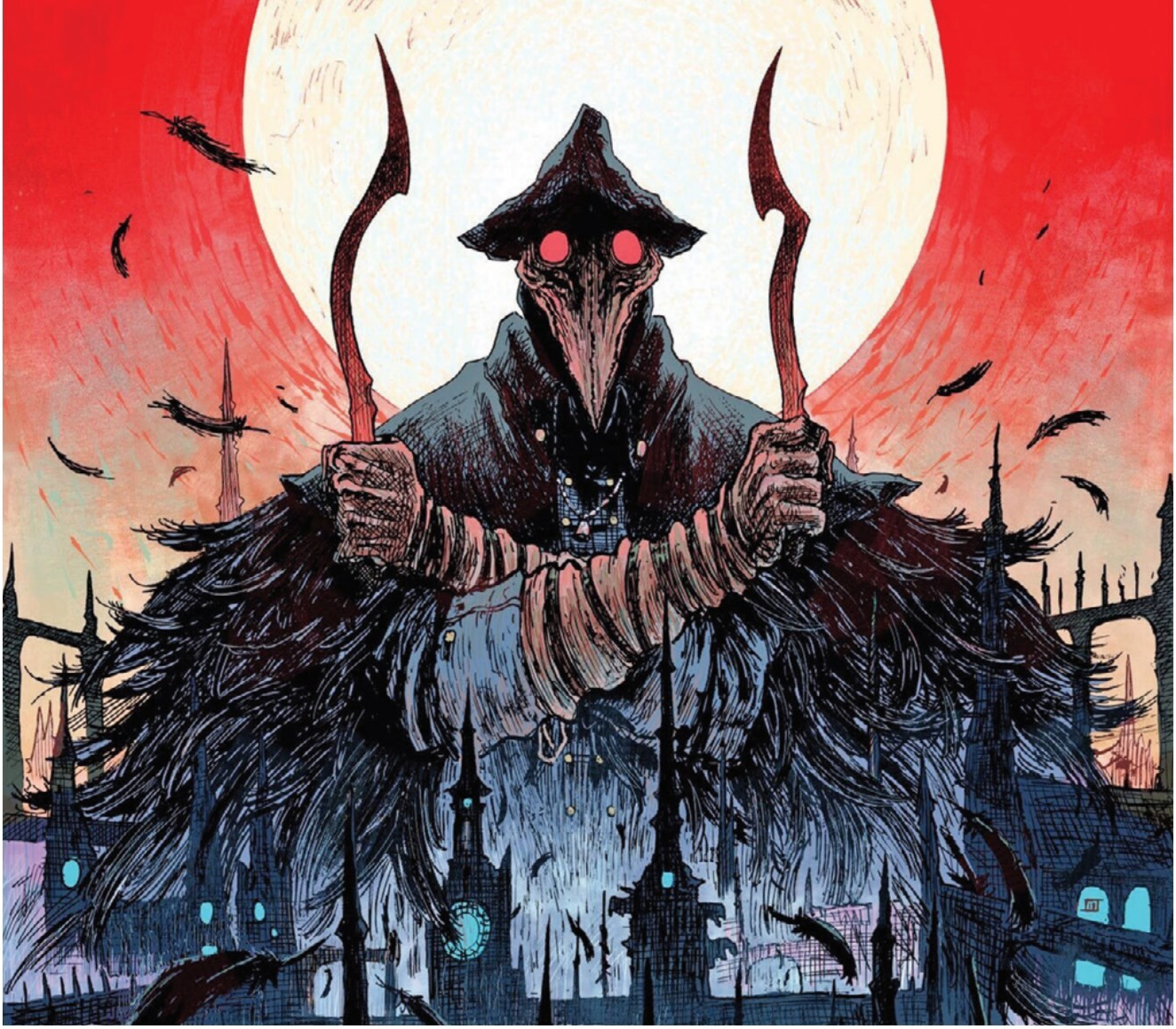
"We don't want to fall into this repeating pattern where players will kind of know what to expect from us," he says. "Having said that, for example, the first story DLC that we have promised, I've seen a lot of speculation online about what it will be, and I can say confidently that they weren't close to the mark."

Dying Light 2's story concludes with some definitive choices, especially as it relates to protagonist Aiden, his allies, and his enemies. Creating new story content with that in mind presents a challenge for Techland. The team is sidestepping that for now by developing narrative content that happens "sideways to the main events."

"At some point, we will actually start adding to the events that happened at the end of the game," Smektała says.

Challenges aside, he says the word he'd use to describe everyone's feelings is "excitement."

"We really just can't wait to see people that are interacting with this stuff, because some of the things we are adding [are] quite unique," Smektała says. "Some of it is us betting on ideas that are maybe a little out of the box. We'll see what the community thinks, but I'm feeling really positive about it." ■



TOP FIVE

# GETTING GRAPHIC

## The best video game comics to read right now

BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE

**1** For over a decade, **Assassin's Creed** has had consistently good comics. They tackle fascinating historical moments like the Salem Witch Trials, expand the present-day storyline, and explore established Assassins and the Brotherhood's new faces.

**2** Canon to the story depicted in Zero Dawn and Forbidden West, the **Horizon** comics give side characters, like Erend and Talanah, extra time to shine. Not only do they add additional backstory, but some aspects tie directly into Forbidden West.

**3** **Life is Strange** has taken on a new life in comics, focusing on fan-favorites Max and Chloe. The comics take place after the first game's events, presenting intriguing choices about the characters' future through more than 20 issues.

**4** **Sonic the Hedgehog** isn't new to the comic scene, but the Blue Blur's latest ventures by IDW Publishing reach a new high bar. Action-filled plots, new villains, and fantastic art give energy to the long-time Sega mascot's hijinks.

**5** From Software's **Bloodborne** (pictured) is known for its fantastic lore. The comics expand upon that and also capture the game's tension, atmosphere, and frequent deaths. The four volumes tell standalone stories, highlighting different characters from Yharnam. ■

# The Blue Blur Returns To The Silver Screen

With *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* in theaters now, we sat down with those involved to talk about the process of bringing Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles to the big screen **BY BRIAN SHEA**

**THE FIRST *SONIC THE HEDGEHOG* FILM WAS AN UNLIKELY SUCCESS STORY.** Following a disastrous debut trailer, in which the iconic blue hedgehog looked far removed from his appearance in every other form of media, the studio went back to the drawing board. Instead of discouraging the filmmakers, the backlash motivated director Jeff Fowler and the rest of the team to pay more attention to the enthusiastic fan base.

"They were absolutely right to request us to work harder and to make adjustments," Fowler says. "And then to come out the other side and for everyone to be able to high five and celebrate, it felt like we ended in a place where they were happy, and the film was a film that they could embrace. Now, moving forward, it just feels like we have this really wonderful relationship with the fans."

The result was a character design that looked much more like the Sonic fans are familiar with, and the box office numbers reflected an appreciative audience, with the first film raking in more than $300 million worldwide. The authenticity Fowler and his team delivered in response to the fans paid off.

Part of that equation included actors who provided authentic performances for the brand's biggest characters. Jim Carrey (*Dumb and Dumber*, *The Mask*) delivered an all-in performance as Dr. Robotnik. Ben Schwartz (*Parks and Recreation*, *House of Lies*) is a lifelong fan, so sliding into the role of voicing Sonic the Hedgehog was a dream come true. However, to find his performance as Sonic, he intentionally didn't study any of the other interpretations of the character.

"When I read the script, to me, Sonic felt like this kid, this really energetic kid," Schwartz says. "I didn't really look at the other performances, so I took it from the movie script because I didn't want to feel like I was copying anything. But in my head, I was like, 'I want him to have heart, I want him to be excited, I want him to feel like a kid, and I want him to be funny. I want him to deflate any situation that feels too big for him with a joke, because he's been through a lot of stuff, so that's kind of how he's lived his life.'"

In the first film, Sonic finds Tom, a human father-figure character played by James Marsden (*Westworld*, *X-Men*). While Marsden has a long history of prominent roles, acting alongside a virtual character has been a new experience for him.

"I've worked with actors where the animated hedgehog who's not there is more animated than the person I'm acting opposite," Marsden says, laughing. "It's a different skillset. You're on set and you're sitting in a rowboat having a heart-to-heart with your son, and he's not there; it's just a voice from behind the camera somewhere. It definitely takes a little bit of your imagination."

In *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, moviegoers are introduced to silver-screen versions of Tails and Knuckles, voiced by Colleen O'Shaughnessey (*Sonic Boom*, Sonic Forces) and Idris Elba (*The Wire*, *The Suicide Squad*), respectively. Like Carrey, Elba provides A-List star power, but O'Shaughnessey grants additional authenticity, thanks to her long tenure voicing Tails in the games and recent TV series.

O'Shaughnessey thought her appearance as Tails in the first movie's credits scene would be a one-and-done situation and never expected to join the main cast. "I had no idea where this would go; I had no idea how excited people would be to see it!" she says. "People sent me videos of their theaters exploding in joy! I knew people liked Tails, but I had no concept of how that reaction was going to go!"

*Sonic the Hedgehog 2* recreates multiple iconic scenes from the games. The snowboard scene in the trailers is reminiscent of games like Sonic 3 and Sonic Adventure, but Fowler loves the climax of the second Sonic game. "Tails flying the *Tornado*, delivering Sonic into battle on the biplane ... it's such an iconic image from Sonic 2," he says. "To be able to do the big-screen, cinematic version of that, it gave all of us goosebumps and got us so excited."

Schwartz agrees that *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* delivers plenty of fan-service and nods to iconic moments from the games, but he also has a list of other game moments he'd love to make the jump to live-action. "Oh my goodness, in Sonic 2, the casino zone is pretty amazing!" he excitedly says. "But there is this zone in Sonic Mania – though I guess it wouldn't make sense because we're a film – but in Sonic Mania there's this incredible zone that's all about movies and zapping you from a TV to a different TV. I was blown away by how amazing all that stuff was. I'm a big side-scroller guy because that's what I came up with. Sonic 2 has so many things I'd love to put in there. Sonic Mania has a similar fun vibe."

*Sonic the Hedgehog 2* is in theaters now, but don't think that once you see it that's the end of the Sonic saga. A third film has already been greenlit by Paramount Pictures, as has a live-action show starring Knuckles for Paramount Plus. When you add a mid-credits scene for *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* that sets the table for the next entry in an exciting manner, the future of the live-action Sonic franchise looks bright. ■

## OUR REVIEW

*Sonic the Hedgehog 2* retains all of what made the first film good while shedding much of its dead weight. Despite some sequences and arcs overstaying their welcome, I was captivated thanks to high-flying action scenes and humorous banter whenever any of the main characters were on screen. I loved the characterizations of all the major players. While *Sonic the Hedgehog*'s unexpected positive reception could have put its sequel in a difficult spot since it comes in with higher expectations, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* clears the higher bar, delivering a better movie in nearly every way.

# Going Back To GDC

## What an in-person video game event looks like in 2022

**BY JILL GRODT**

GDC
REGISTRATION
Have your QR code and photo ID ready
Can't find your QR code?

Image credit: GDC

**IN MARCH OF 2020,** I was a freelance video game journalist working out of the Bay Area. Spring was in the air, meaning the Game Developers Conference – which provided me vital employment in the past – was just around the corner. Then COVID-19 transformed from a thing people speculated about to a real and present threat. In the wake of this transition, companies began to pull out of the conference, in-person events stopped, and the future suddenly seemed wildly uncertain.

Two years later, GDC opened its doors once again, marking one of the first non-virtual conferences since the pandemic's onset. The experience of walking through the halls was both familiar but also noticeably different.

### Know The Show

As the name suggests, the Game Developers Conference centers on the people who make games, and this gives it a distinct flavor from many other events which cater to the larger gaming audience. The week is filled with a multitude of talks with ranging themes, from very technical design breakdowns to exploring the success behind a popular title. It's for game developers by game developers, and, while filled with less news than an E3, GDC provides a unique perspective on what goes in to making the industry's most popular games.

### It's Quiet, Too Quiet

I noticed several glaring differences between this year's event and previous ones. Unsurprisingly, some of the biggest changes relate to the pandemic. On the first day of the conference, I was almost happy to see a line stretching around the block for registration. It seemed like a strangely normal part of going to a convention. It didn't feel normal for long. As soon as I entered the lobby, I was greeted by a handy COVID-testing booth, standing ready for anyone that needed its services.

The pandemic left its mark across the experience in all kinds of ways, both tangible and otherwise. It quickly became apparent that, despite the long line, the attendance numbers were meager. And it didn't help that the first panel I walked into was unpredictably conducted via webcam, making my

The 2022 Game Developer Choice Awards. Image credit: GDC

Image credit: GDC

physical attendance feel a little absurd. Talks on big-name titles like Horizon Forbidden West barely attracted four audience members per row. The most well-attended presentation I went to, a funny and insightful overview of Wordle's success by its creator, was dotted with empty seats. This is a far cry from 2019, when most talks required showing up at least 30 minutes early to secure a chair or a spot standing along the outer walls. Everything from special events, the crowd on the show floor, and just general walking traffic reflected the lower turnout.

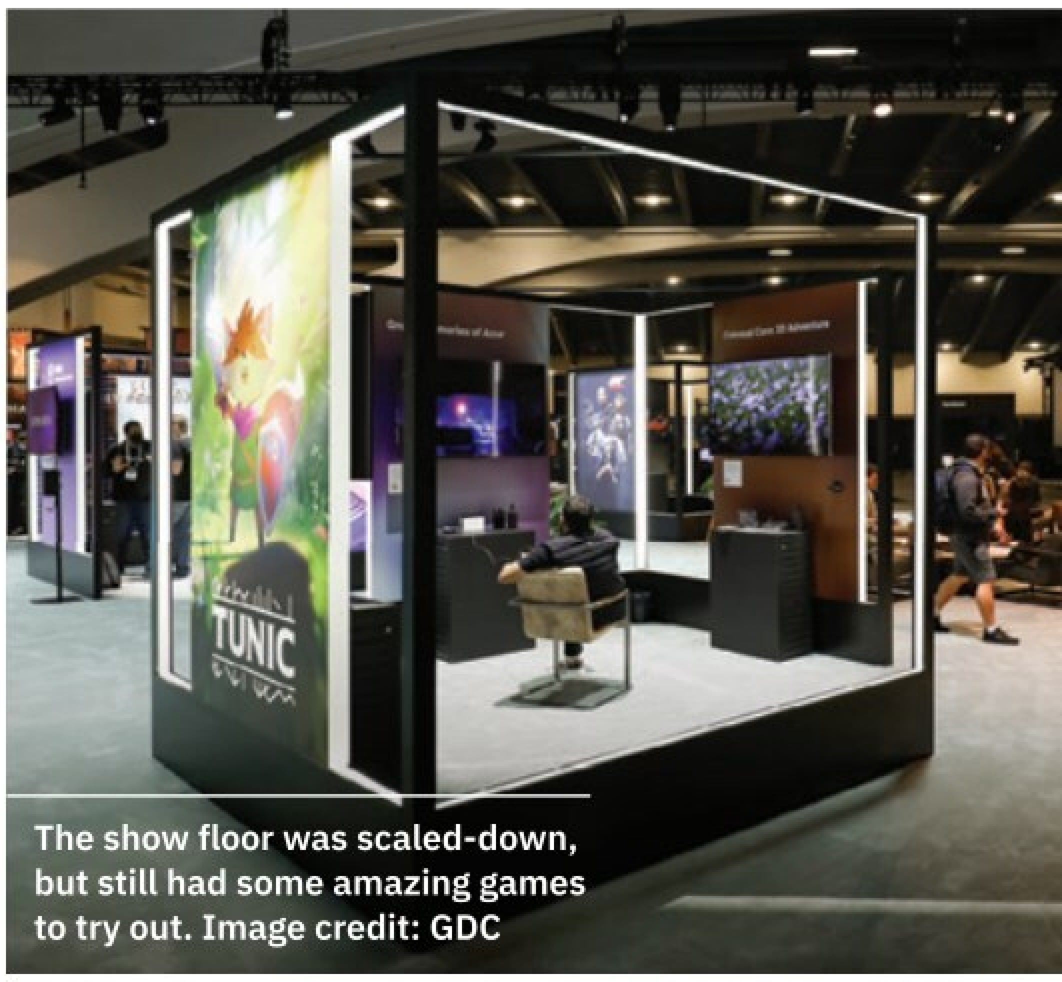
## Distinctly 2022

Every conversation I had with developers throughout the week included some mention of the current state of the world and its unforeseen effect on game creation. A surprising percentage – from small creators like Gun Jam developer Jaw Drop Games to larger teams like IllFonic working on Ghostbusters: Spirits Unleashed (see p. 64) – revealed they had either not seen their coworkers in person for a significant stretch of time or had never physically met them before. In a mind-boggling number of cases, I was the first person they'd seen experience their game live who was not connected in some way to the studio. Many expressed how excited they were to take their observations back to work, which injected a little more pressure into the hands-on demo process.

GDC 2022 was unique in one other noticeable way. Even before the conference began, half the emails I received involved companies working with NFTs, Blockchain technology, Web3, the Metaverse, or some other current buzzword. These companies pervaded the show floor, something made even more striking since familiar gaming staples like Sony, Microsoft, and many others had sparse or no presence. It was a similar story for the official talks themselves. Perusing GDC's schedule, 19 seminars popped up when I searched for NFT-related sessions, 23 for Blockchain, 28 for Metaverse, and 10 for Web3. The crowd at the Game Developers Choice Awards, which takes place during the conference, cheered when those on stage would comment critically on this unusual landscape, making their feelings on these exhibitors fairly evident.

## Is It Good To Be Back?

It's impossible to ignore the show's changes, but the general feeling in the air seemed to be genuine enthusiasm. From journalists, developers, PR, and everything in between, many I talked to admitted to some sense of relief that things are, if not entirely normal, becoming a little more recognizable again. The industry is still figuring out how to hold large, in-person events and keep things safe, and it may be a while until showcases feel like they once did. As evidenced by the rash of positive cases tracing back to the recent event, there is still a lot to be concerned about. Walking through the GDC doors two years after it seemed like conferences would never happen again was a tremendous experience, but one tinged with trepidation. ■



The show floor was scaled-down, but still had some amazing games to try out. Image credit: GDC

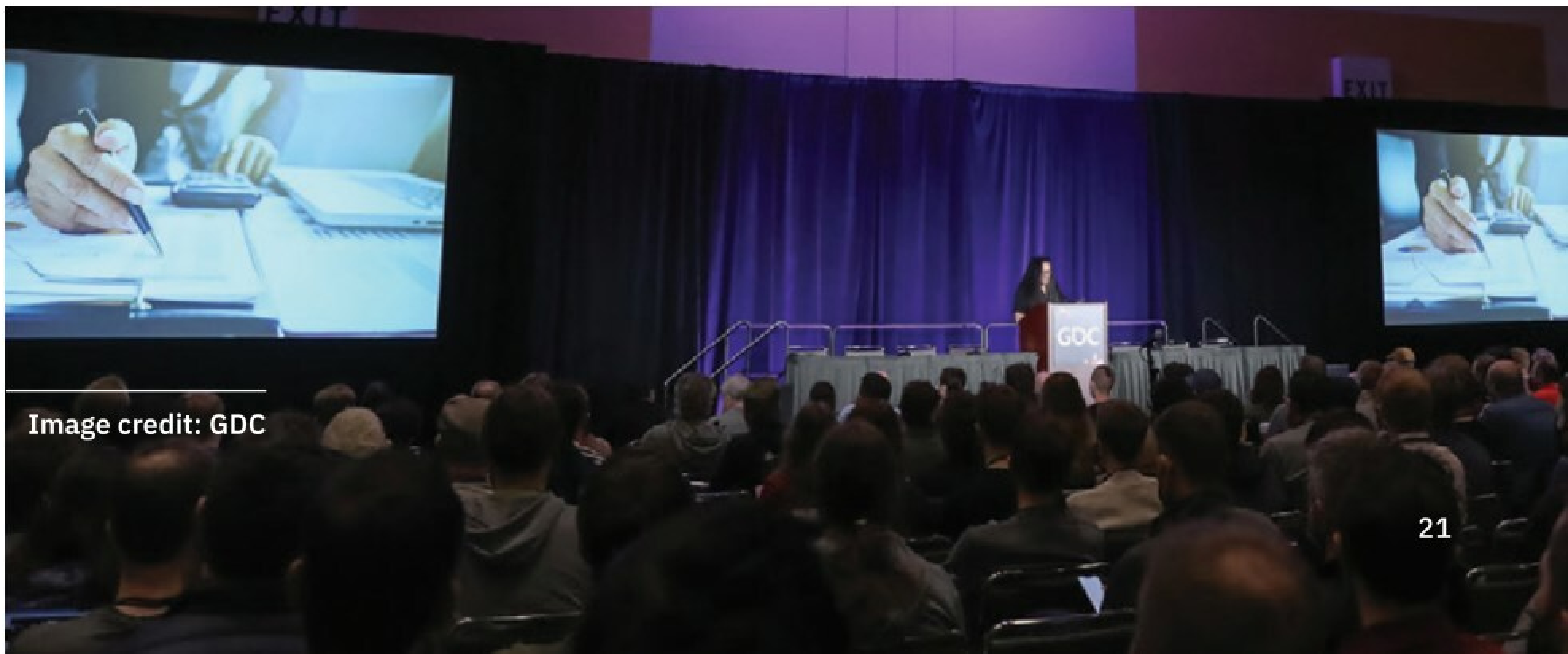


Image credit: GDC

# Revving Up The Right Racer

**With both PlayStation and Xbox delivering exceptional racing experiences in the last few months, we take the wheel to discover which one is best for you.** BY BRIAN SHEA

**IN NOVEMBER 2021,** Playground Games launched Forza Horizon 5 on Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, and PC. The game was an immediate hit, attracting more than 15 million players and earning the series' highest review score from *Game Informer*, a 9.5 out of 10. Just a few months later, in March 2022, Polyphony Digital launched Gran Turismo 7 on PlayStation 5 and PlayStation 4, again receiving critical praise (see p. 79). With both companies creating well-received racing games with decidedly different approaches to the genre, players might have difficulty figuring out which one is right for them.

Few games remove the barrier between the player and fun like Forza Horizon 5. As soon as you land in its gorgeous, loving recreation of Mexico, you can drive nearly anywhere you please. Around seemingly every turn, exciting and diverse challenges provide different tasks based on what kind of action you prefer.

The open world constantly impresses as you seamlessly drive from highways to beaches and deserts to rainforests. The emphasis here is on having a great time as you explore Mexico, enter events, and progress the growth of your festival. The story plays out through set-piece moments where you complete tasks like racing up a volcano or facing off against a duo of monster trucks. Despite its more casual, arcade leanings, the driving in Forza Horizon 5 is rock solid, and rooted in the simulation-driven mechanics of the Forza Motorsport series.

Gran Turismo 7 is perhaps the antithesis of Forza Horizon 5's design philosophy. Rather than getting out of your way and letting you do what you want, Gran Turismo 7 keeps you in a single lane for as long as it can maintain. The latest entry in Polyphony Digital's legendary sim-racing franchise delivers stellar driving mechanics and an undeniable passion for automotive history. It never stops reminding you how much it loves cars. If you want to learn all about the historical importance of the Ford Mustang, Gran Turismo 7 has you covered.

With an emphasis on vehicle collection, Gran Turismo 7 is a much more curated

nturismo
Silvia

**Left:
Gran Turismo 7,
Right:
Forza Horizon 5**

experience, delivering a largely linear path through its career mode as it doles out vehicles rapidly. Unfortunately, the on-the-track exhilaration gets weighed down by an aggressive economy requiring grinding or microtransaction purchases. However, those craving a curated experience through a career mode focused on collection will find a lot to love about Gran Turismo 7 and its fantastic gameplay.

As of this writing, Forza Horizon 5 is the more well-rounded, less frustrating experience. However, with Polyphony Digital promising significant changes to the economy over the next several weeks, it could live up to the potential promised by its phenomenal core mechanics. Those who want a more casual, less rigid experience should lean towards Forza Horizon 5, while those who want to experience a structured love letter to the automotive industry should go for the PlayStation offering. Regardless of your preference of platform or approach to the racing genre, these two entries prove developers can still deliver excellent experiences appealing to various segments of the gaming population, even when they exist in a very specific corner of the game industry. ■

**QUICK TAKE**

I'm thrilled that we have top-notch racers on both new-gen consoles so soon after the platform launches. Both Forza Horizon 5 and Gran Turismo 7 provide some white-knuckled speed, and I enjoy driving both, albeit for different reasons. It's fascinating to see two such distinct approaches to the genre succeed in their own way.

**- MATT MILLER**

## What About Casual Racing Fans?

Racing games like Forza Horizon 5 can appeal to a broad audience, but what about racing games for non-racing fans? The franchise most people point towards is Nintendo's Mario Kart – and for good reason. **Mario Kart 8 Deluxe** (pictured above) is arguably the best entry in the long-running series, and the perfect racing game for those who wouldn't exactly call themselves racing fans or even hardcore gamers. It's the highest-selling game on Switch for a reason, plus it's getting 48 additional paid DLC courses over the next two years.

However, Mario Kart 8 Deluxe isn't the only casual racing game in town. Just staying on Switch, **Cruis'n Blast** aptly revives the classic arcade racer for the home console market, adding tons of courses and cars to the game you've likely seen if you've been to a Dave & Buster's at any point in the last few years. If you want something a bit more intense, but hardly any more serious, the Burnout franchise is a fast-paced delight that anyone can enjoy. **Burnout Paradise Remastered** is available on nearly every platform, while the excellent **Burnout 3: Takedown** and **Burnout Revenge** are playable on modern Xbox consoles through backwards compatibility. For something a bit more recent, **Hot Wheels Unleashed** and **Wreckfest** provide a ton of racing thrills without the steep learning curve.

GEAR

# KIT OUT YOUR PS5

BY MATT MILLER

## ① SCUF REFLEX PRO

We've waited a while for a high-end upgrade to the standard PS5 DualSense, but SCUF's offering makes for an impressive package. The Reflex Pro boasts a rubberized performance grip, remappable rear paddles (for most inputs, but not the triggers), included interchangeable thumbsticks, and the ability to set three separate profile configurations.

The controller's ergonomically placed rear paddles feature a satisfying clicky interface that sits just under your ring and middle fingers. Still, one or more of those four inputs can be removed and replaced if you don't want them for a particular game. The three distinct profiles for those paddles are easily customizable on the fly, or the controller helpfully arrives with a recommended FPS, Sport, and Racing setup built-in. The tweakable convex and concave thumbsticks can make a big difference, but it's nice that the default options feel familiar if you're not looking for a change.

Sony's DualSense is one of the best first-party controllers ever made. Alongside the Reflex Pro's high-price tag, that reality means that this upgrade is not recommended for casual hobbyists. Conversely, the Reflex Pro's stellar performance, response, and tactile sensation make it hard to beat for more competitive players who desire increased customization and comfort for long sessions.

$229 | *scufgaming.com*

## ② RWA RACING WHEEL APEX FOR PLAYSTATION 5

Sony just released one of the best sim racers in years with Gran Turismo 7, so it's natural that you might want to up the authenticity even more with a solid racing wheel. Hori's RWA wheel for PS5 gets you in that door without breaking the bank, so long as you're willing to make some compromises. The plastic construction, limited 270° rotational angle, and the absence of force feedback are all prices you pay for affordability. Even so, the driving response and control are still excellent, the clamp mounting works well, and would-be drivers can tweak everything from the pedal sensitivity to the wheel deadzone using an available companion app.

$119 | *stores.horiusa.com*

3
WD_BLACK
SN850
GAME DRIVE
NVMe SSD

### ③ WD_BLACK SN850 SSD WITH HEATSINK

New-gen games take up a lot of space, so there's a decent chance you've already been deleting and adding games from the PS5's included storage. Suppose you're ready to keep a more extensive library queued up. In that case, your best bet is this expansion drive with heatsink (we don't recommend the version without), which offers some ample expansion space. Load times are comparable or even marginally improved over the PS5's base drive. Be aware there is a minor install required, but it's a manageable task even if you haven't leveled up your tech skill.

$119.99 (500 GB), $169.99 (1 TB), $319.99 (2 TB) | *westerndigital.com*

### ④ RAZER KAIRA PRO HEADSET

Razer's new headset is a beautiful match to the existing PS5 aesthetics, with white and black hardware and a blue glow. But its performance makes it one of the best options to enjoy that new PS5 3D audio, including one feature that helps it stand apart. The "HyperSense" haptics won't be for everyone, but they undoubtedly add something new to the audio experience, enabling highly nuanced positional vibration inside the headset that matches the incoming sound. In practice, it dramatically expands the sense of immersion, especially with rumbling sound effects like explosions or machine-gun blasts. Thankfully, the haptics can be customized to three intensity levels or turned off entirely.

The slick haptic feedback isn't hiding anything about the overall sound; the audio is pristine, with a deep and lovely soundscape and excellent surround presentation. And while the USB-C dongle works on PS5, the headset is an equally solid performer on PC, mobile, or most other Bluetooth-enabled devices. ■

$199 | *razer.com*

ALL AGES

# BUILDING A FUTURE

## Enriching your child's learning and life through games

**BY ANDREW REINER**

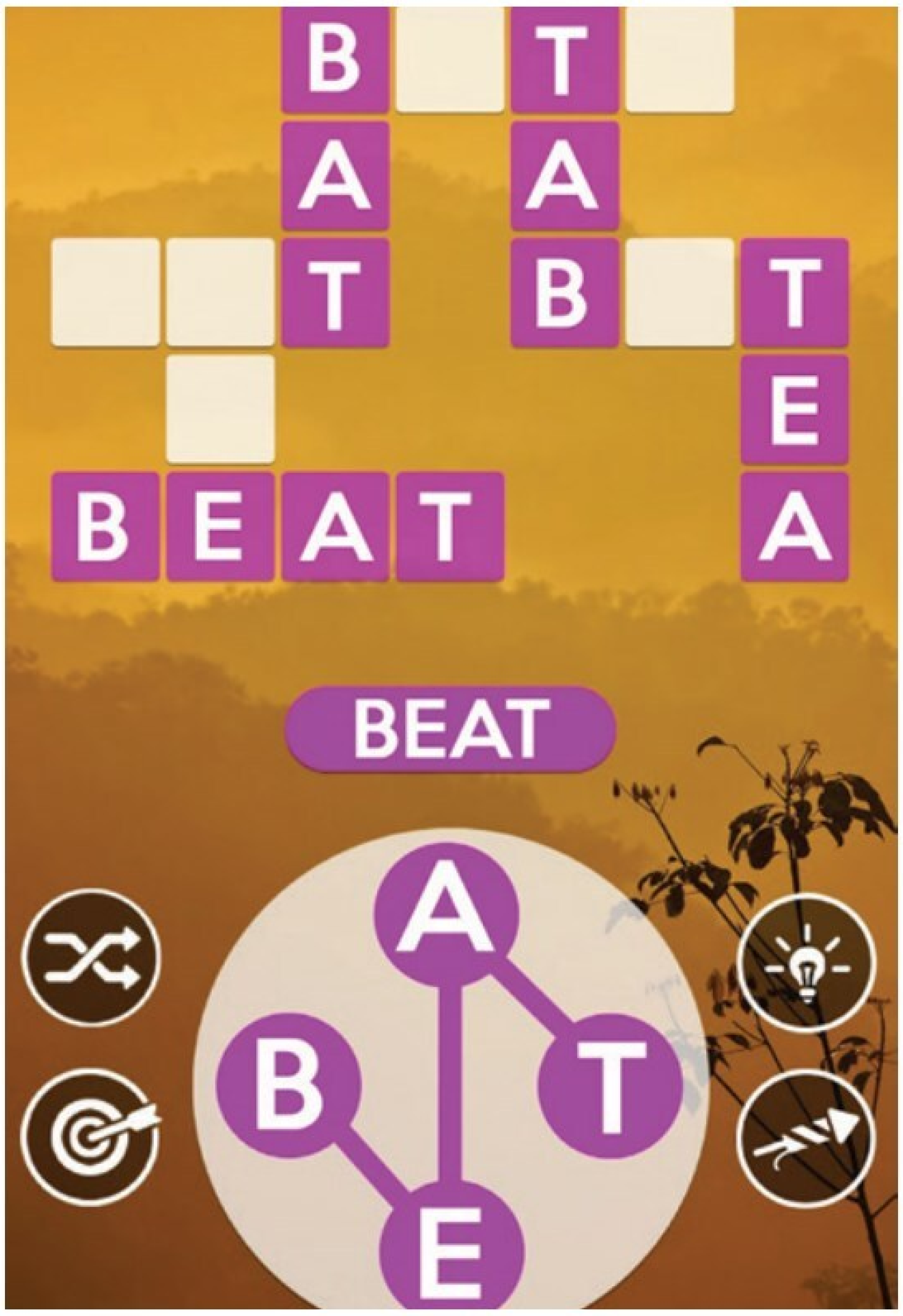
**AS I WRITE THIS** issue's *All Ages* editorial, my daughter is next to me, her face buried in my phone. She eventually asks me what "beta" means, and I tell her. She's playing a game called Wordscapes, which is an excellent tool for helping kids practice spelling and discover new words. My daughter and I worked out a deal that if she plays 20 minutes of Wordscapes, she can then scamper upstairs to play Roblox with her friends for the next two hours. She balked at the idea at first but has taken to enjoying Wordscapes. She periodically asks me for help and cashes in her in-game coins for answers when she has them, but the game is helping her learn, and I'm grateful for it.

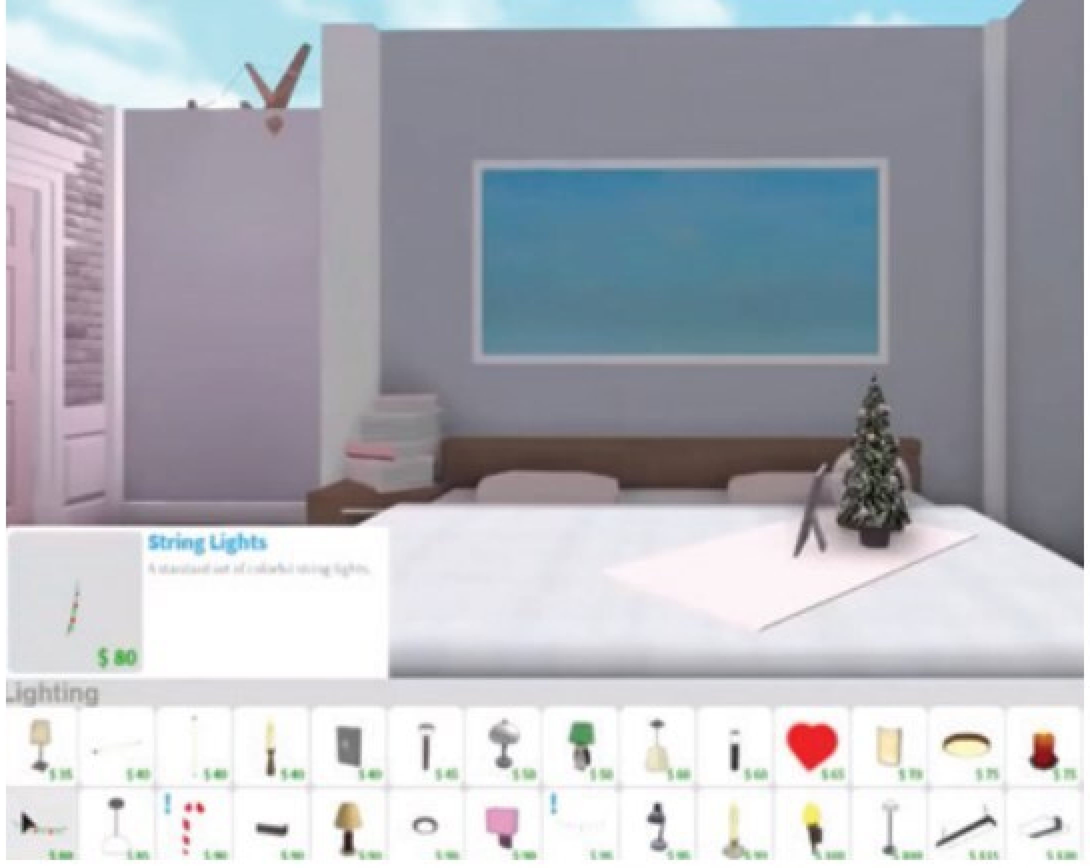
Wordscapes is for kids eight years of age and older. It's a free download but is one of those miserable apps loaded with ads. You can remove all of them through the in-game shop for $5.99. One of the great things about Wordscapes is how it continually feeds new challenges to the player to create a playthrough free of stops or being kicked out to a menu.

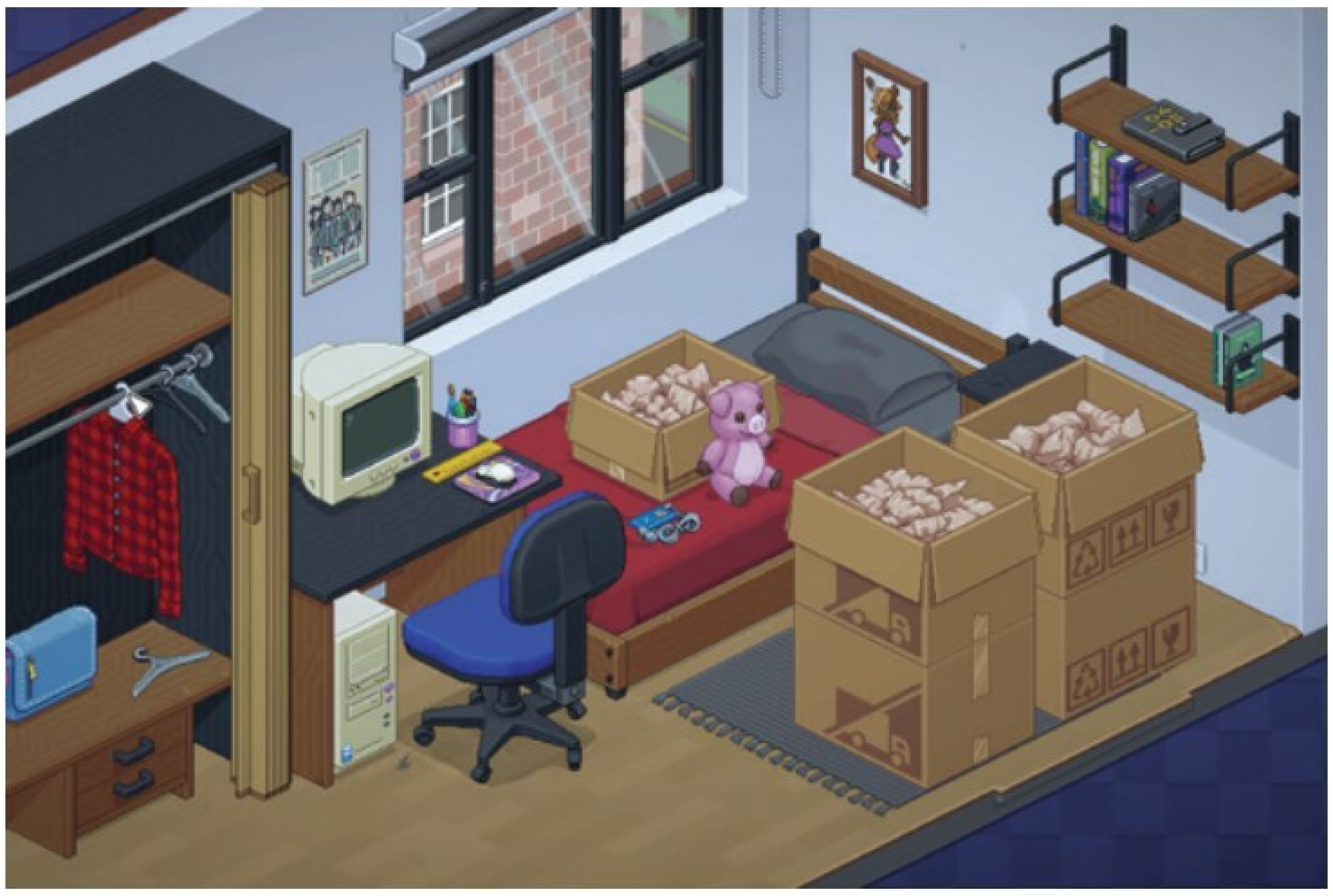
## LEARNING TO ORGANIZE, CLEAN, AND CONSTRUCT

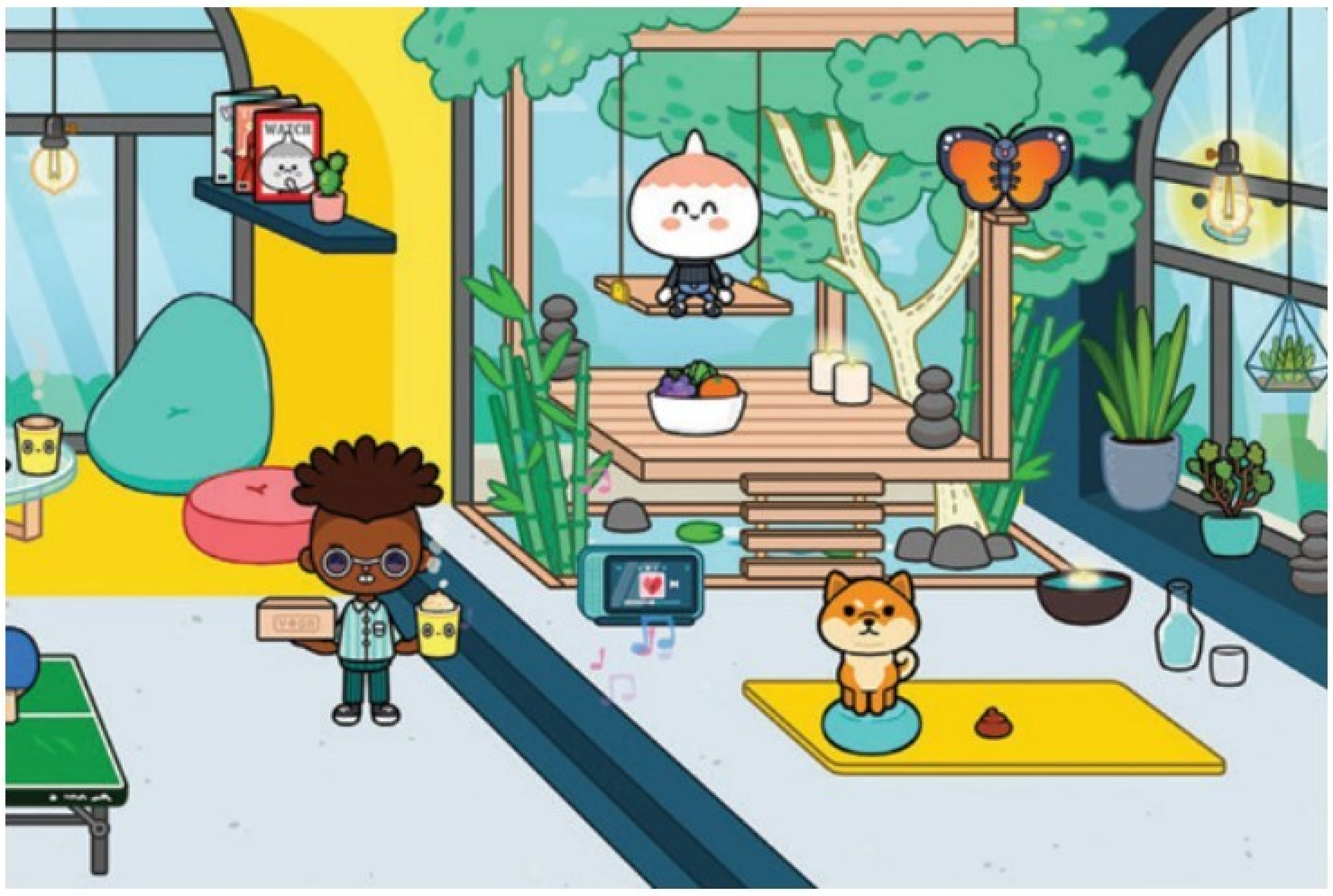
I have lived many virtual lives through The Sims games and learned some things about myself in the process. One of my big takeaways was I liked how clean and organized my Sim's life was. I stopped playing one day and reorganized my comic book room. I'm hoping my daughter has similar observations while playing Unpacking, a wonderfully made game about placing items where they belong in rooms.

All you do is open a box, grab the topmost item from it, and put it where you think it should be. If you grab a book, you can put it on a shelf, desk, or in a drawer – all these locations are correct. Some items, like a backpack, can live anywhere, yet the game doesn't always allow it.









↘ Clockwise from top: Bloxburg , Unpacking, Toca Life World, Wordscapes

The ambiguity of some of the placement can be frustrating – as you can't move on to the next room until it is appropriately sorted. However, these moments are few and far between, and my daughter has had a blast playing it. Has it delivered any life lessons? Not yet. She still leaves candy wrappers on the counter above the trashcan, and her room always looks like a tornado rolled through it.

Roblox's Welcome to Bloxburg, a sim-like game developed by Coeptus, is helping my child learn to build in 3D space. The game's focus is to live a complete virtual life, right down to owning a house and vehicle, going to work, and getting to know your neighbors. My daughter's interest is solely in the building aspect – something she discovered on her own while watching one of her favorite YouTubers, Frenchrxses. Some of her videos are tutorials that walk the player step-by-step through the construction of elaborate mansions. My daughter spent days working on Frenchrxses' Christmas home. She would play the video for a few seconds, match the architectural build in the game, and then when it came time to add little touches to the room, my daughter would add her flair.

After completing the elaborate build, all of my daughter's future builds were far more dynamic and beautiful. As I watched her play one day, I smiled because I knew she was learning about game design and developing skills that could help in other creative fields down the road. She loves doing this kind of stuff and wants to learn how to do it better. Just know that Bloxburg has a steep onboarding ramp. Your child will need to work at it and become fluent with the building tools before attempting elaborate constructs. Bloxburg's items are also unlocked using an in-game currency, which is earned through play, but odds are, you'll likely need to spend some real money to get the Robux to buy them.

Minecraft is another game that allows for creative expression. For the younger kids out there, the parent or guardian should set all Minecraft play sessions to Creative mode to remove the combat elements and the need to hunt for supplies. The focus at that point is intently on building whatever you can dream up. Both Bloxburg and Minecraft support cooperative play. I recommend being in the same room as your child on a different gaming setup if you want to join them in their creative endeavors.

If your youngster mostly plays on mobile devices, Toca Life World is an exceptional game appealing to a wide age group. The inputs are easy enough for first time players to grasp, and the amount of creativity speaks loudly to my daughter at the age of nine. Toca Life World is a free to play decoration game, where you can freely place items wherever you want, almost like putting stickers into a book to create a scene. You can also customize a good number of the items, such as selecting hairstyles and clothing for the characters.

When you download the game, you get eight locations and 39 characters for free. That's just a small fraction of what is offered, however, and you'll have to pay to unlock more. If you want to add a little more, you'll spend a few dollars for new buildings and props to expand the options your child has. To get it all – the route I would recommend if you feel your kid will play the game extensively – unlocking everything costs roughly $70. If you do this, your child can dive into over 100 locations, choose from over 500 characters, and interact with 500 pets. It's a huge game with plenty of environmental variety. Getting it all also removes the inevitable "Will you get me this?" inquiry from your child whenever they boot up the game. Make sure your little one is into the experience before even venturing down this path. ■

*My plan for the next* All Ages *is to share my thoughts on play time and how much is too much for your child. I would love to hear your thoughts on this and what approaches you currently use. If you have input, drop me a line at Reiner@GameInformer.com*

# THE MODERN GAMER'S GLOSSARY

Whether you've been playing for a long time or just getting into the hobby, we throw around a lot of terms in our discussions of games. Here are some of the most commonly used and misunderstood words worth knowing in today's gaming landscape

BY MATT MILLER

**Accessibility**
A descriptor we reserve to discuss a game's capability to support players of all types, specifically those with sensory, physical, or cognitive impairment or any disability that might affect the enjoyment of the experience.

**Asymmetrical**
A competitive game in which the players are not on equal footing, or in which the competing teams each control different characters or elements that are unique from their opponents. A common variant is one-versus-many, in which a single player competes against everyone else, but usually with significant advantages.

**Battle Royale**
An online multiplayer genre in which players compete to be the last person or team standing, often with scavenging, survival, and area exploration elements. A shrinking zone of play often time-limits the match.

**Critical Path**
Also called the golden path, this refers to the most direct point from game beginning to end for completion of the core story or experience, but without experiencing side content, replay, or other optional elements.

**Emergent**
Gameplay experiences that arise through player experimentation, creativity, or discovery, but not explicitly outlined or bound by the structure or story of the game.

**Indie**
Defying easy classification, games may be designated indie because they are actually independent games, or may alternately have an indie "feel," even while following a more traditional publishing release model. In either case, a combination of innovative systems or narrative, experimental nature, artistic goals, unique aesthetics, or small team size earns a game this label.

**Isometric**
An angled graphical view reveals the characters from above and to the side and shows more of the surrounding environment than a top-down perspective might allow.

**Meta**
Most-effective-tactics-available (meta) refers to the combination of character build, weapons, or other factors that lead to the highest chance of success in a game. Often discussed regarding a game in a particular moment, or the current meta. Alternately, in narrative and thematic terms, the technique of self-referential commentary on the game or genre being played.

**Metroidvania**
An informal designation often used around exploration-focused games with gear- or ability-gated progress, a non-linear interconnected map, and gradual improvement of abilities, weapons, or skills. The term is sometimes considered an oversimplification but is always part of the heritage established by Metroid and Castlevania: Symphony of the Night.

**MMO**
Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games feature large populations of players in a shared playspace, interacting in a large and open shared world. While some games are pure MMOs, the term also discusses games that borrow specific mechanics or ideas from the genre.

**MOBA**
Multiplayer online battle arena games feature two teams competing on an established environment or battlefield, often delineated by distinct travel lanes. Players usually control a single character whose weapons or abilities expand throughout the match, often with strategic implications.

**Procedural generation**
A method of level, character, or other feature generation that algorithmically mixes random elements to create a unique result, often to present a novel experience to the player each time they engage with a game.

**Season Pass**
A style of monetization in which players pay a fee for access to specific in-game content as it's released. Sometimes manifesting as a tiered layer of progression unavailable for those who haven't paid for access, frequently time-limited. A battle pass may be part of a season pass or, in some cases, synonymous.

**Souls-like**
A recent term referring to the rapid expansion of games modeled in part from the Dark Souls or Demon's Souls games. They're usually characterized by pronounced difficulty, lost currency or progress on death, and a methodical timing-based approach to combat.

**Triple-A**
An industry term that has come into common usage, indicating high-budget games from the most prominent publishers or developers.

**Live-Service**
An increasingly common designation for a game supported by multiple ongoing updates, patches, and changes – potentially over years – often representing major or even fundamental restructuring of major mechanics or available experiences. Sometimes called living games.

**UI**
User interface (UI) refers to the components, menus, and graphical elements that help a player navigate a game, including but not limited to health, maps, currency, or abilities. A user interface may include a Heads-Up Display (HUD) of information available during play, such as an ammo counter.

## THIS OR THAT?

### Buff or Nerf?
A buff increases the viability, value, and power of a weapon, ability, or character. A nerf reduces the same.

### Cross-Platform or Cross-Save?
A recent innovation, cross-platform describes a multiplayer game that can be played with other players on a separate platform, such as Xbox and PlayStation. Cross-save implies a game in which save data can transfer between the different platforms upon which that game appears.

### Developer or Publisher?
A developer is an individual or studio that builds and maintains a game. A publisher is an entity that releases, publishes, and sometimes distributes the game to the public. Publishers sometimes finance the development studio or may own or operate their own internal studios. In some cases, the publisher and developer are the same.

### First-Party or Third-Party?
First-party development comes from the company that manufactures a particular video game console. Third-party developers create games or content for one or more consoles (or other hardware) but aren't part of the company that makes and releases that console. Less commonly, second-party is an informal term for external studios developing exclusively for a platform holder.

### First-Person or Third-Person?
Two standard views through which a game might present its perspective. First-person view is through the eyes of the protagonist. Third-person view shows the player character on the screen.

### FPS or FPS?
FPS appears commonly but carries two separate meanings and is dependent on context. Frames-per-second (FPS) appears in discussions of graphics or tech to describe the number of frames that appear onscreen per second – a higher number is often indicative of better visual quality. First-person shooter (FPS) describes a shooting game played from the first-person perspective, with a view through the eyes of the protagonist.

### PC or NPC?
A distinction first expressed in tabletop role-playing games, the two terms are now common across gaming. Player characters (PCs) are the in-game avatars controlled by the player, and usually act as the narrative's protagonist. In contrast, non-player characters (NPCs) are any individuals that appear in the game that the player does not control.

### PvE or PvP?
Player-versus-Environment (PvE) conveys a game or mode where one or more players face off against computer-controlled enemies or challenges. Player-versus-Player (PvP) experiences feature direct competition or combat between actual players. Many games feature both in separate modes.

### Roguelike or Roguelite?
A reference to an early 1980 video game called Rogue, a roguelike is a game that is comparable to that release. It often features high challenge, procedural level generation, and permadeath, as players make repeated runs through a dungeon crawl or other structured sets of levels. Roguelites alter that formula by adding a meta-progression element, usually allowing some aspect or improvement to carry over from one run to the next. ■

# RAISING HELL

*Evil Dead is back in the spotlight as Saber Interactive brings Ash and his friends into an all-new terrifying twist on player-vs-player*

by

**DANIEL TACK**

SABER INTERACTIVE AND BOSS TEAM GAMES ARE TARGETING THE ASYMMETRICAL HORROR GENRE FOR A BATTLE BETWEEN DEMONS AND SURVIVORS, BUT IT'S QUITE DIFFERENT THAN OTHER CREATURE FEATURE FORAYS ON THE MARKET. IN EVIL DEAD: THE GAME, DON'T EXPECT TO FIND THE HUMAN HEROES COWERING IN CORNERS OR ATTEMPTING TO FLEE – THIS 4V1 FEAR FESTIVAL TAKES THE FIGHT DIRECTLY TO THE FORCES OF EVIL, HACKING ENEMIES IN HALF AND BLOWING THEM TO PIECES.

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**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC **STYLE** 5-Player Online **PUBLISHER** Saber Interactive, Boss Team Games
**DEVELOPER** Saber Interactive **RELEASE** May 13

### THE CABIN IN THE WOODS

In 1981, Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* made a grisly splash onto the horror scene, featuring what's become an almost formulaic setup: Five unfortunate friends head out to a cabin in the woods for a good time, and then, spoiler alert, good times are not had. The idyllic journey into the country turns into a bloody massacre, spurred on by an ancient evil book known as the *Necronomicon*. I remember I first saw the movie in a time when villains like Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, and Michael Myers fought for dominance over our grade-school nightmares. The film offered the terrifying simplicity of facing your friends after they become possessed undead. It gloried in the sheer, unflinching willingness to lean into the intimate, grim goriness of it all, and the experience left a strong impression. Interestingly enough, it's possible that *The Evil Dead* wouldn't have had the chance to thrive without horror maestro Stephen King's praise. After seeing it out of competition at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival, King wrote a rave review, leading to New Line Cinema picking the film up for distribution.

The movie has gone down as a cult classic and had plenty of influence within the horrorsphere. But Bruce Campbell's portrayal of character Ash Williams has undeniably become the campy, comical face of the otherwise incredibly macabre franchise, infusing the gruesome themes and blood splatters with a hefty dose of comedic quips and one-liners. Multiple films followed the original, including *Evil Dead 2* and the completely off-the-wall *Army of Darkness*, where Ash travels back to medieval times to fight the titular demonic forces. In more modern times, the series has had both a soft reboot and a TV series, with yet another film, *Evil Dead Rise*, scheduled to hit this year. And then, of course, there's Saber Interactive's upcoming game.

Saber was not only able to get Campbell on board to star as Ash, but also many of the original actors from the robust cast. While the focus in many horror properties may be the show-stealing villains, that's flipped in the Evil Dead franchise, where Ash's antics often take center stage. "You watch *Nightmare on Elm Street* for Freddy Krueger, you watch [*Friday the 13th*] for Jason," says chief creative officer of Saber Interactive Tim Willits. "You watch *Halloween* for Michael; you watch *Evil Dead* for Ash."

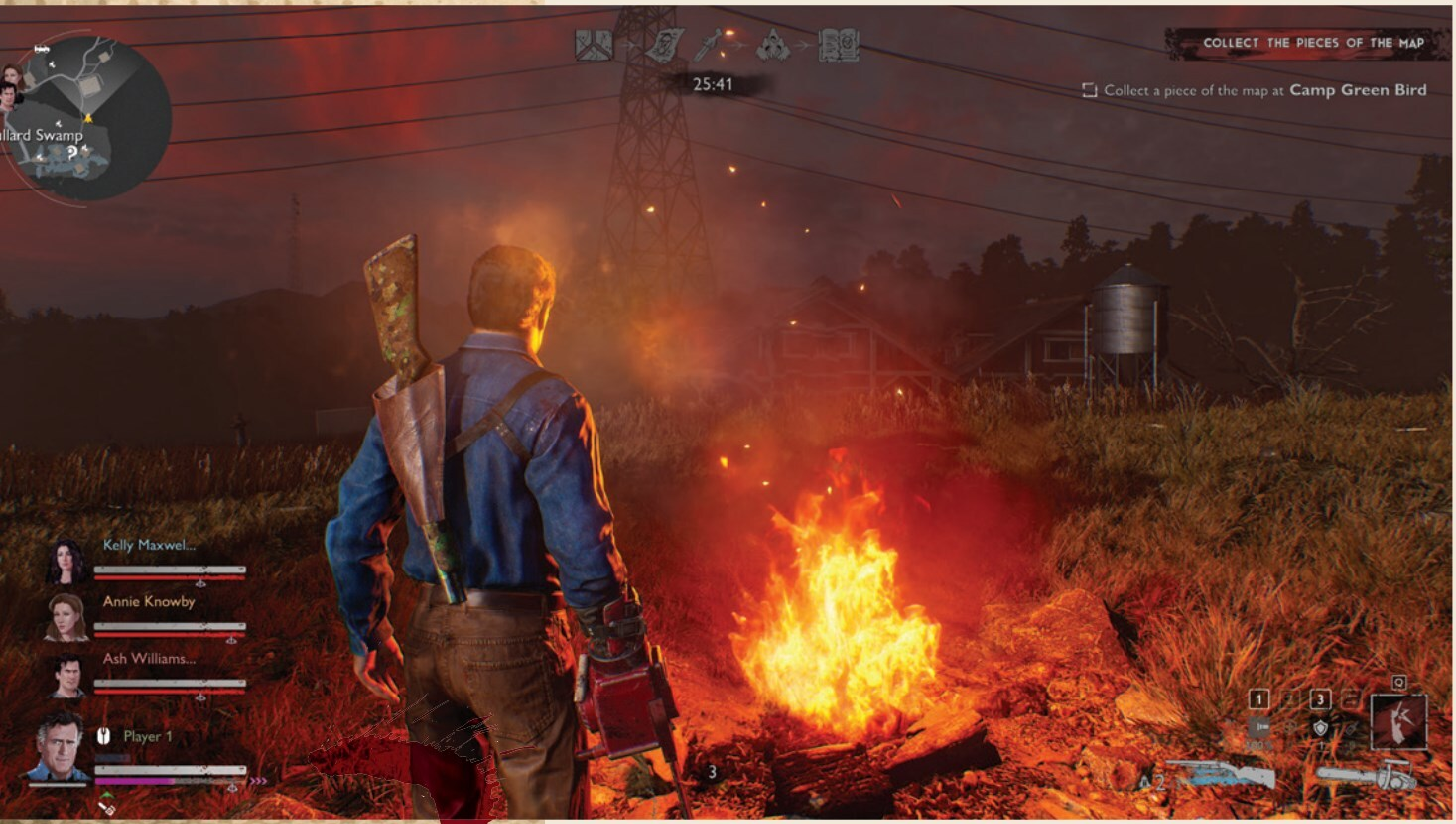
## SETTING THE STAGE

Saber Interactive and Boss Team Games are tapping into the characters, settings, and lore to create a 4v1 asymmetrical online experience that puts a group of players against one big nasty demon foe, also piloted by a player. This concept may sound familiar, as it's certainly not the first foray into these genre waters, but Evil Dead: The Game is quite different from the other games on the market.

Instead of attempting to complete a set of tasks and escape from the inevitable and invulnerable killer here, the survivors have a massive array of armaments to bring death and destruction to the demon armies. Can you chop a Deadite (zombie) in half with a shovel or hack them in two with a lumberjack axe? You sure can, and there are even finishing moves called glory kills to do so with style. You can hew a horde of Deadites down with a chainsaw, and do so with appropriate gore and witty smack talk. That's especially true if you're playing as Ash.

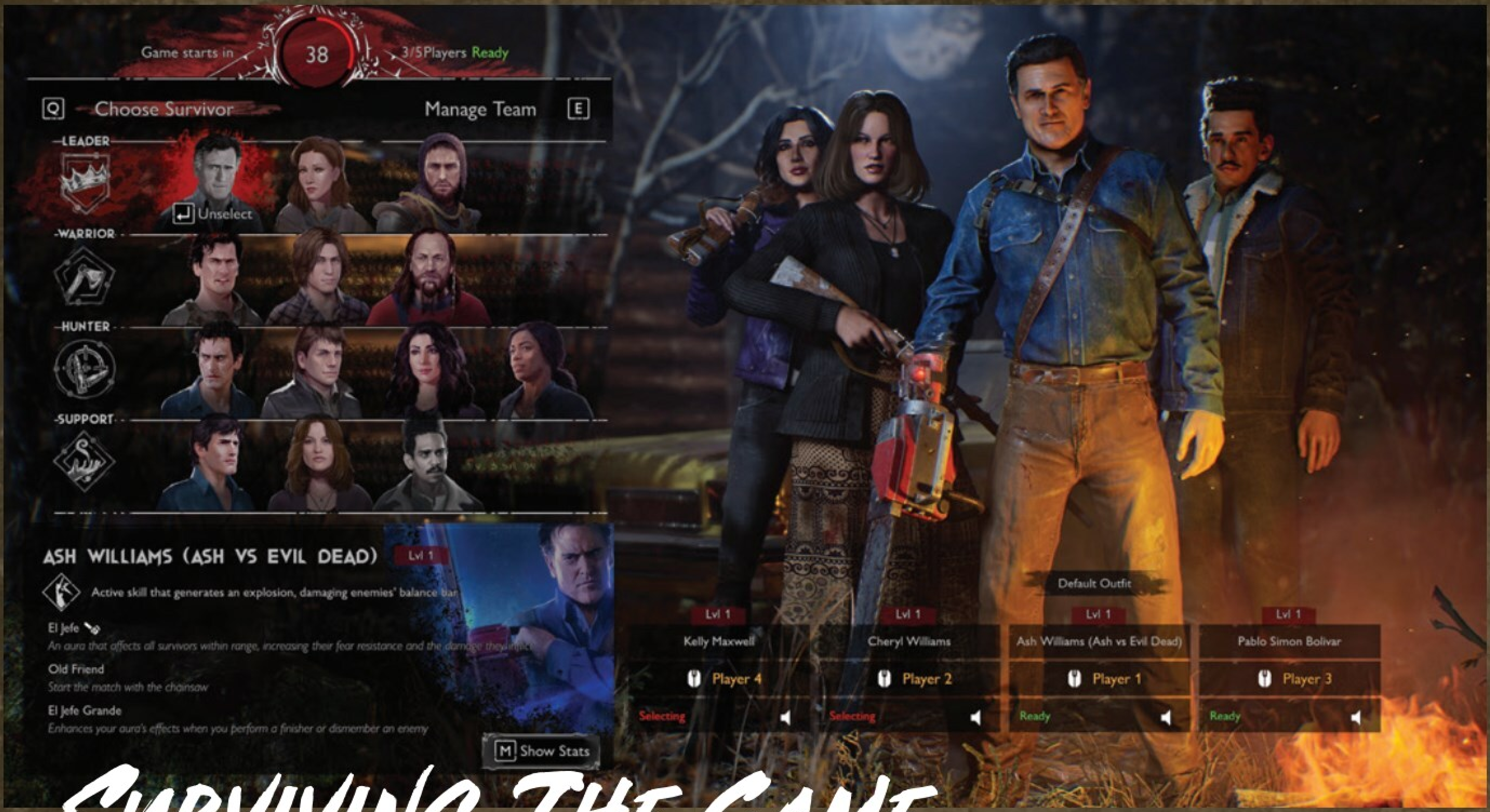
Of course, don't think that the only thing you can do to the forces of evil is hack and slash. Numerous firearms are available, from classic "boomstick" shotguns to power-packed pistols. In fact, the final goal for the survivor team isn't to run away at all. Instead, the team must assemble map pieces and then locate the pages of the *Necronomicon* and the Kandarian dagger – used in the films to take down evil demons. Once all those are in place, it's time for the final act – banishing the dark ones from the earthly plane. In Evil Dead: The Game, there are constant battles and friction, from minor skirmishes with loose AI-controlled Deadites to large "horde mode" style encounters that include multiple player-summoned and piloted enemies.

Instead of occupying a corporeal form for the entire match, the demon player in Evil Dead: The Game flies around the map, setting traps for players around crucial points that are likely to be explored, gathering infernal energy to power abilities, and summoning/possessing Deadite units. Each Demon's kit includes a set of special Deadite units and a boss character, which the Demon player is likely to occupy during critical events and moments. These boss characters often have much stronger abilities than standard Deadites, including area-of-effect skills and attacks that can be devastating with the right timing. Because of this, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with a range of Deadite attacks before you head into a play session as the Demon, as you will often be zipping inside one to cause as much trouble as you can. In true *Evil Dead* fashion, the Demon can also possess players. While the takeover is brief, conditional, and costs the Demon player considerable resources, this can cause massive chaos if set up correctly.



COLLECT THE PIECES OF THE MAP

Collect a piece of the map at **Camp Green Bird**



ASH WILLIAMS (ASH VS EVIL DEAD) Lvl 1

Active skill that generates an explosion, damaging enemies' balance bar

El Jefe

*An aura that affects all survivors within range, increasing their fear resistance and the damage they inflict*

Old Friend

*Start the match with the chainsaw*

El Jefe Grande

*Enhances your aura's effects when you perform a finisher or dismember an enemy*

# SURVIVING THE GAME

Survivors are divided into four broad categories in Evil Dead: The Game, with multiple options in each. In fact, you can play Ash in every single type, as the game draws upon different versions of Ash (based on movie/show/timeline) to let players get groovy with every archetype.

"That was our number one fear when we started, that everyone would play Ash," says chief creative officer of Saber Interactive Tim Willits. "There are so many other characters that have cool stuff. I mean, you saw yesterday you need a Cheryl on your team; she may be a little OP [overpowered], to be honest. You need a Pablo to drop in those amulets. So I'm not worried about people only playing Ash anymore. But that was a concern that we had."

Of course, the other characters are cool, too – everyone has their own unique weapon specialty that they love using and get a bit of unique flair when using their chosen armaments. After gaining a few levels, you can even start a match with Ash pre-equipped with a chainsaw. There are no rules about how many of each archetype can be in a game, as all survivors are well suited to combat regardless of their specialization, but each specific character can only be chosen once per match.

## LEADER

Leaders come with beneficial auras that incentivize you to stick with the team and buff everyone up. This ability includes things like fear resistance, damage resistance, additional damage – all kinds of good things that make you a perfect team player. While this may seem like the default way to play, certain strategies might have your team going in pairs or completely splitting up to tear through the map fast before the Demon can achieve significant strength.

Leaders include Ash (*Ash vs Evil Dead*), Annie Knowby, who's perfect for team comps that love ranged damage, and Lord Arthur, a melee-centric buffer that starts with a sword.

## WARRIOR

Do you like getting in the thick of it with heavy melee and some bonus health? If so, Warriors are the class for you. Why worry about bullets when you can bash, slice, and glory kill any Deadite foolish enough to cross your path? As you might expect, most skills for Warriors reward players for "getting in there," including things like health for completing finishers, area-of-effect melee damage, and bonuses for getting hit or your shield depleted.

Warriors include Ash (*Army of Darkness*), Scotty and his wild lumberjack axe, and Henry the Red, who can go fully immune to everything for real action.

## HUNTER

A stark contrast to the Warrior, Hunters prefer to dish out their damage at range, inflicting more punishment, and are able to hold more ammunition. This class includes skills that start matches with ranged accouterments and headshot bonuses. Hunters seem to have more abilities that sync up with treasure hunting to help find and procure better loot during a match.

Hunters include Ash (*Evil Dead 2*), crossbow specialist Ed Getley, Kelly Maxwell, and Amanda Fisher. Amanda has a powerful ability that allows you to blast away without consuming ammunition, making her a serious addition to any starring cast.

## SUPPORT

Supports have a potent baseline effect, so every time they use standard health or shield consumables, they also trigger on allies close by. They also start with additional consumables and have abilities that allow them to offer massive boons to the entire squad, bringing a team wipe back from the brink of death. Don't ever feel like you're going to have a bad game if you're stacked with support, because the crew will be incredibly tough to take down.

Supports include Ash (*Evil Dead*), Cheryl Williams (who can create a fantastic healing zone), and Pablo Simon Bolivar. Pablo can craft amulets (shield consumable) for your team and boost your shields in various ways.

# MEET THE DEMONS

There are three major Demons in Evil Dead: The Game to face off against and play as, each with particular signature specialties, unique Deadites, and powers. Like the survivors, these Demons also have specialization trees that players acquire points to fill out, allowing for additional strength and customization that persists between matches. It seems inevitable that more Demons and archetypes will become available over the lifetime of the game. Still, the starting roster includes some new faces from the TV show and also an extreme fan favorite. Let's meet these evil entities and briefly look at what kind of chaos they can conjure.

## WARLORD

Warlord Demons are perhaps the most basic Demon playstyle to understand, an archetype that allows for big buffs to Deadites, making them dish out more damage and take less. In a big fight where survivors are stuck in place going after one of the primary objectives, Warlords can punch them down with raw power. The Warlord boss can summon up boss Henrietta, who's packed with sheer offensive and defensive stats for standard attacks.

However, Henrietta is at her best using her special abilities, such as laying down a toxic trail of gas – perfect for wrecking survivors huddled around a healing kit, fallen ally, or objective. This technique combines well with another powerful area-of-effect skill she commands, a monstrous belly flop that can shred health bars. Outside of her area attacks, Henrietta can also lock down a survivor in a granny hug, forcing the rest of the team to free them from the deadly grab.

## PUPPETEER

If you're the kind of Demon player that likes possessing minion and player alike to do your dirty work, Puppeteer is the archetype for you. Instead of direct force, Puppeteers require more finesse and planning to do work, but the results can be devastating. Puppeteers can summon the boss unit Eligos, which players might recognize from *Ash vs. Evil Dead*.

While Eligos may be a bit more fragile than some other Demons, he's every bit as dangerous – perhaps even more so in capable hands. Eligos is invisible during movement, meaning you can easily sneak up on a group of survivors engaged in battle with some lesser Deadites and initiate a telekinetic surge to immobilize the entire team. Elite Puppeteer minions can clone themselves and force opponents to move or face lethal shocks. Expect to shift around into units more often while playing this archetype, which is tailored to a more active "control" style Demon.

## NECROMANCER

Necromancers unsurprisingly command skeletal legions and have access to a special unit, the skeleton flautist that "doot-doots" your opponents into an early grave by buffing up the rest of the army. While immobile, the flautist is an extreme high-priority target that will cause huge problems if not removed quickly. Later skill additions can even render survivors unable to use healing consumables while in its musical range. Necromancer will likely prove to be a popular pick among Demon players, as its boss is none other than Evil Ash from *Army of Darkness*.

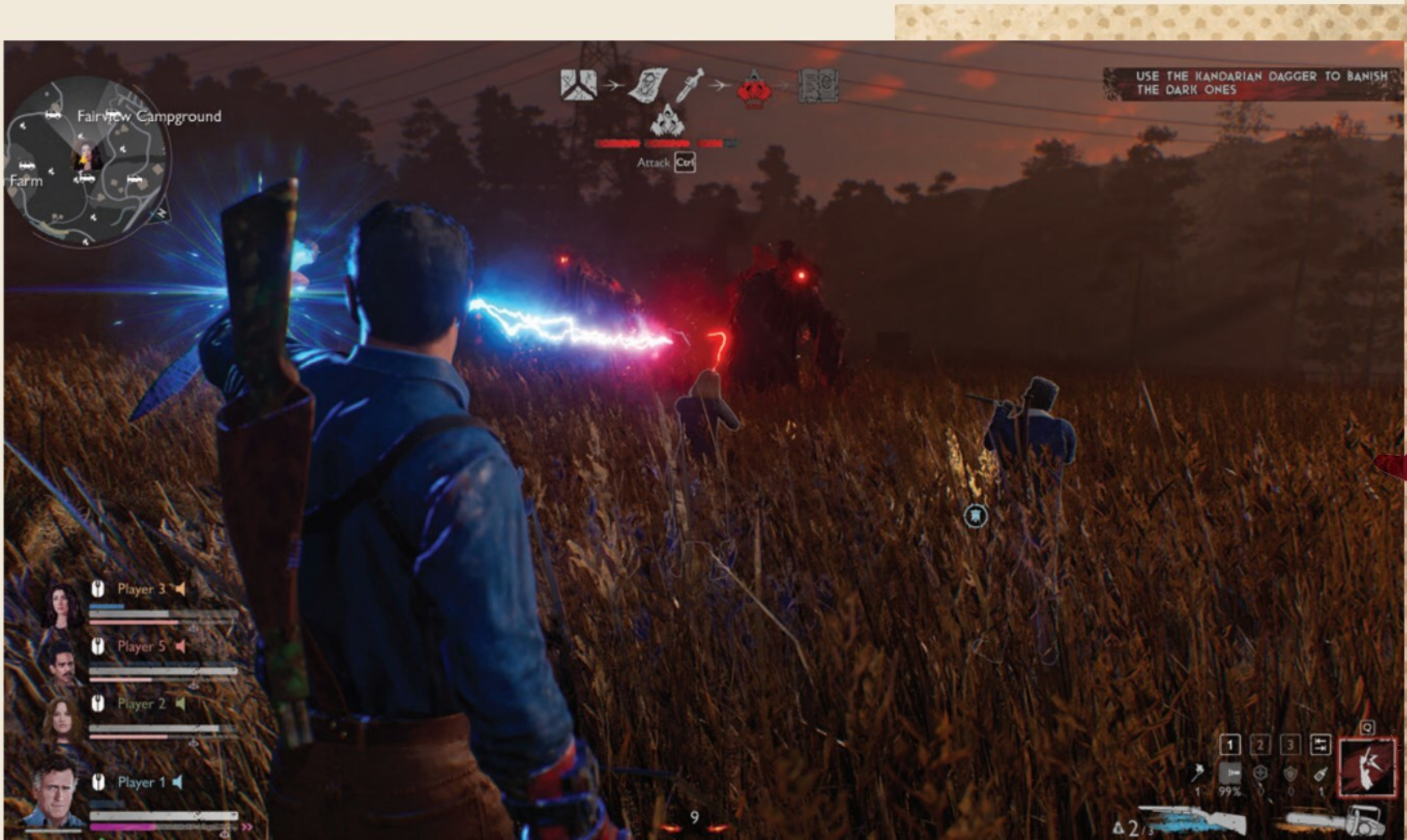
Evil Ash can summon skeletons, bring them back to life, and even use a lifeforce choking grab to isolate and drain a survivor, replenishing their hit points. With judicious use of abilities, Necromancers can find themselves in command of a skeletal army that's too much to handle, overwhelming survivors with inspired, undying troops.

## HUNTING DOWN HORROR

When I go hands-on with the game, I spawn with my three allies outside of several rickety shacks. While our immediate goal is to collect map pieces, it's a good idea for us first to loot the surrounding area. Filling our bags with Shemp's Cola for healing, amulets for shields, matches for a fire, and a wide assortment of weapons, both melee and ranged, is the order of business as we set to grabbing everything that isn't nailed down. With the push of a button, I open the map and realize the enormous game space, with tons of ground to cover and areas to explore. While not every inch of the map will be relevant in each game, the spacious play area makes each experience different and gives the survivors a breather from the Demon.

Elsewhere, the Demon player has begun to stalk us, attempting to fly around to discover our location while collecting resources, leveling up, and setting traps. As I wonder how we'll proceed across the vast environment, one of my teammates rolls up in a car and motions to get in. Evil Dead: The Game has wheels, and you can use vehicles for cruising quickly around, zipping to objectives or escaping a horde of Deadites. There's a flipside to the sweet speed, though, as Demons are alerted to any joy rides the survivors take, meaning it's usually best to employ after the Demon has discovered your crew. In addition, the Demon can also possess cars, so they can be either a valuable asset or an extreme liability, depending on how they're used.

We collect the essential map pieces that allow us to tackle the following objectives, finding the dagger and book pages. These areas are clearly labeled, so they're easy to find for the survivors and the Demon. If the Demon still hasn't seen the survivors, this moment is where things start to heat up significantly. While we've faced off against plenty of low-tier Deadites to this point with grisly gusto (I even took one's head off with a shovel!), the other player is now likely set up at these two critical locations with traps and monsters galore. As we approach the first site to gather up the pages of the *Necronomicon*, I open another chest, hoping to get some more gear and experience points to boost my character for the match. Instead, a hand jumps out at me, substantially raising my fear level [see sidebar]. While we haven't seen the Demon player directly, this is a sure sign that they've been here.



USE THE KANDARIAN DAGGER TO BANISH THE DARK ONES

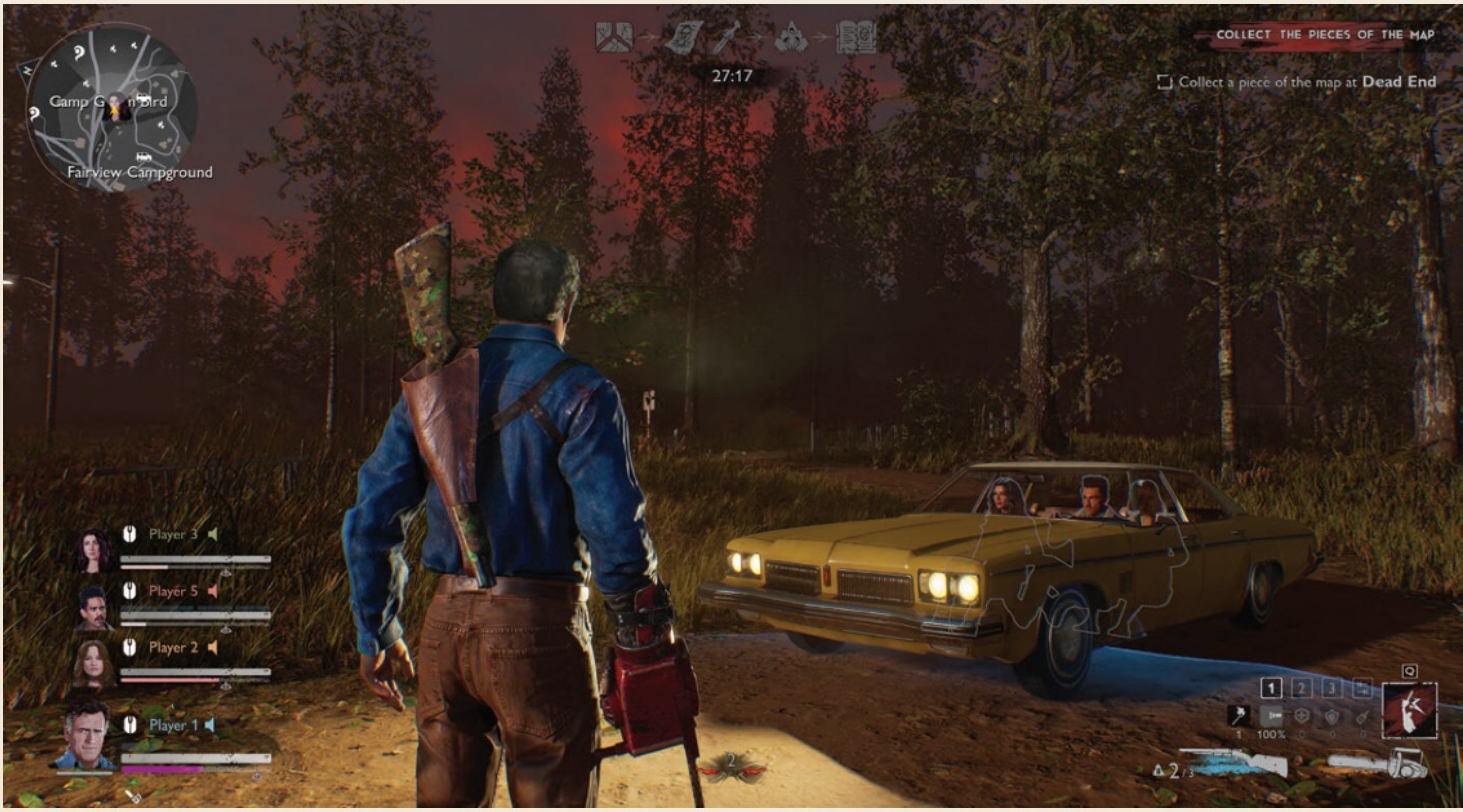
## DUKING IT OUT WITH THE DARK ONES

At both the *Necronomicon* and Kandarian dagger checkpoints, the survivors must hold out against a fierce tide of enemies until the collection is complete. It's important to stay within a circle radius to keep the completion meter ticking up while under assault. The Demon player will do everything they can to knock players out of that proximity – or just kill them outright. The Demon's energy charges up exceptionally quickly during these special events, so they won't have to bounce around the world picking up infernal energy to power summons and skills; they can perform all their summons, scares, and possessions on cooldown during the collection events.

Several of my companions are knocked down during the ritual, but we manage to hold out and collect the pages. When the survivors complete a task, the Demon player is exorcised from the area immediately and sent far away, essentially allowing for a regroup and reset phase before the next big challenge. It's easy enough to bring our friends back from the brink of doom, and before you know it, we're back in a car and riding to collect the Kandarian dagger. After another holdout against the forces of evil, we're finally granted the tools to take the battle to the Dark Ones, the authors of the *Necronomicon* and, as narrative director Craig Sherman puts it, the "master demons."

"They gave birth to all of the bad stuff that you see in the *Evil Dead* universe," Sherman says.

At this point, things change drastically in terms of the game state. The survivors must out-race an encroaching circle on the map (similar to how the action is forced in many modern battle royales) and head to the marked Dark One spawn. This fight is the most intense, with the Dark Ones themselves fighting back, hordes of A.I.



Deadites, and the Demon bringing out their best monsters for one final battle. It's a harrowing confrontation, and a few of my friends get knocked down, but I keep the focus on the Dark Ones themselves, as once their health bar is depleted, you don't need to worry about the rest of the undead menace. While things get pretty dicey near the end, a bit of sidestepping and juking brings us a big win for the good guys.

After the match, I'm awarded points that can be used to enhance my characters with special talent traits permanently. While some are rather mundane, like simple additions to damage and healing, other perks let players start with weapons, execute special signature abilities, etc.

A lot happens in a single match, with the game juggling many different mechanics and features. Finding the right balance was a big challenge, and honing the recipe down to what it is today has taken considerable experimentation. "We tried all sorts of things. We had crafting at one point where you could make your own stuff," says Willits. "We may come back to that in a future update or something where you can craft items, go to the cabin, and defend it. But yes, we did a ton of prototyping, a ton of iteration. The rules changed something like fifty times."

## FACING FEAR

While there's plenty of camp and comedy in the Evil Dead franchise, it wouldn't be a horror game without having some specific scares tied into the gameplay. As the players hunt for loot, trigger traps, and get messed with by the Demon, their fear meter rises. Once it reaches a critical state, the survivors can be possessed, allowing the Demon to sow massive chaos within their ranks. As fear goes up, survivors also experience subtle changes in view and balance, making the world a bit more worrisome and difficult to maneuver. Specific skills and takedowns can be augmented to reduce fear, but there's a surefire way to bring that pesky meter down, and that's with fire. Standing around a makeshift fire will rapidly reduce fear levels. Still, it will cost the survivors a match consumable to get one going, and these can only be activated in specific areas marked on the map. A fire can bring you and your friends together to drop everyone's fear back to zero, but for survivors that choose to split up as a strategy, fear can be a severe problem for isolated individuals and duos.

The Demon also has a universal tool on a cooldown that can be easy to use and a lot more fun in practiced hands, where it dashes through survivors in incorporeal form to trigger a jump scare that pops onto their screen with a loud noise. I'm not usually prone to jump scares, but this one got me a few times – you don't usually see it coming. Careful positioning and execution by the Demon can line it up so that the dash can hit multiple survivors in a single go, creating tons of fear and possibly disorienting them as well. While the players get the jump scare covering their screen, the Demon gets a personalized photo for each survivor tagged in the dash, a fairly cute way to show who got hit.

"We'd love to see the supercut of people jumping out of their chairs when they get that thing popping up on the screen," says narrative director Craig Sherman. "Because, you know, we've all jumped out of our chairs."

## EMBRACING EVIL

My time on the other side of things as the Demon was a markedly different experience, and it ended up my preferred playstyle. Forget teamwork, it's just you versus the humans, and it's a blast to seed an area up with traps and watch the carnage unfold. The real test is getting the hang of moving in and out of possessed Deadites and learning how to spend my infernal energy efficiently. Still, the game's forced interaction big battles make it so that anyone taking on the role of the dark side will be able to summon oodles of standard, elite, and boss enemies to give our heroes plenty of problems.

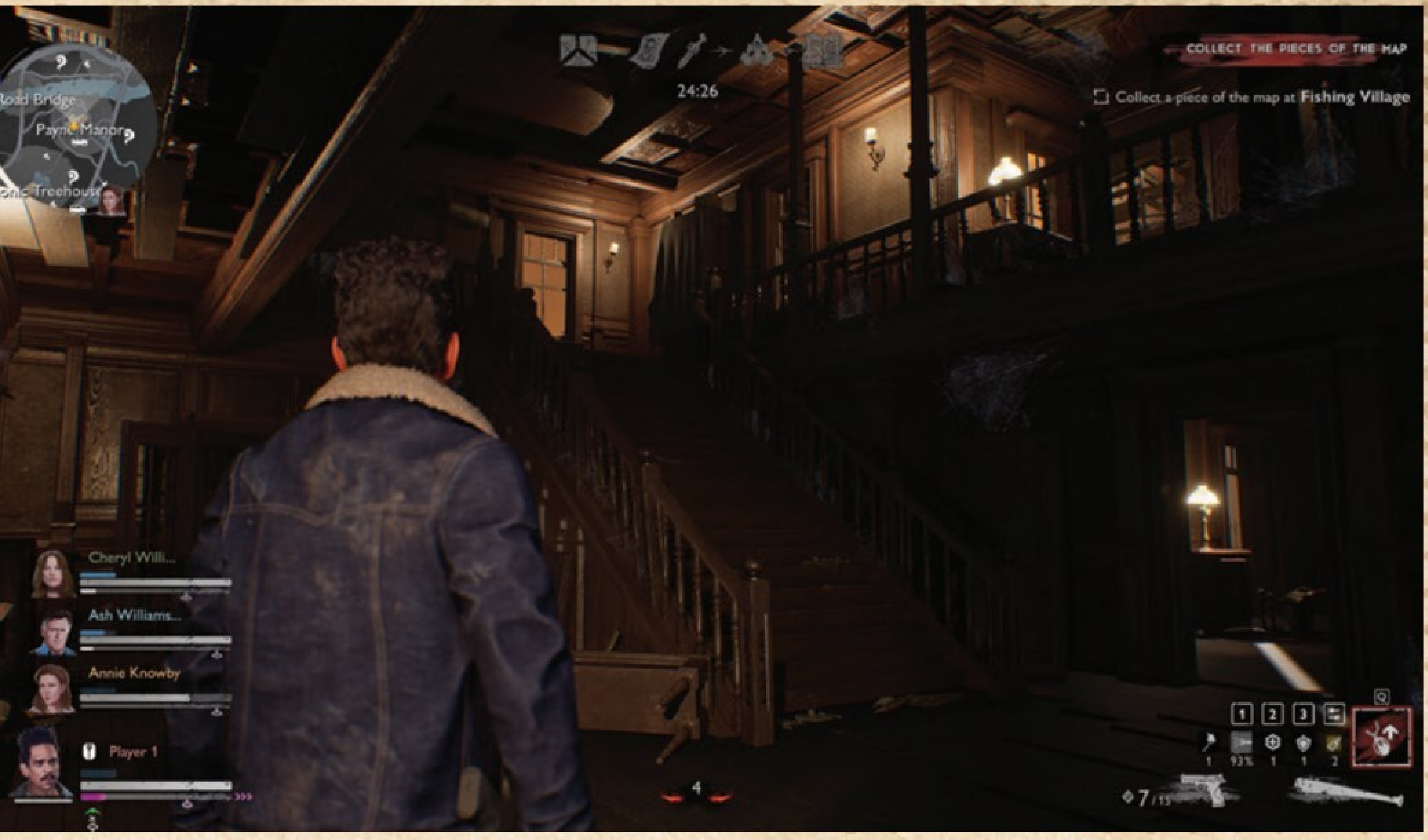
Sometimes, just finding the allied team can take a bit of guesswork as you scour the vast map, but at other times they'll give their location away with a car. Landing a multiple-hit dash scare, possessing boss monsters, and being able to react effectively when the team tries strategies like splitting up are all entertaining. While I'm sure most folks will be inclined to select one of the many Ashes and lay down a path of demon destruction with a deluge of bullets and blunt instruments, Demon is a whole new game and ideal for those looking to play solo. Interestingly enough, the Demon and the survivors can communicate through voice chat in this game build, and I'm curious to see how that works out in the final version.

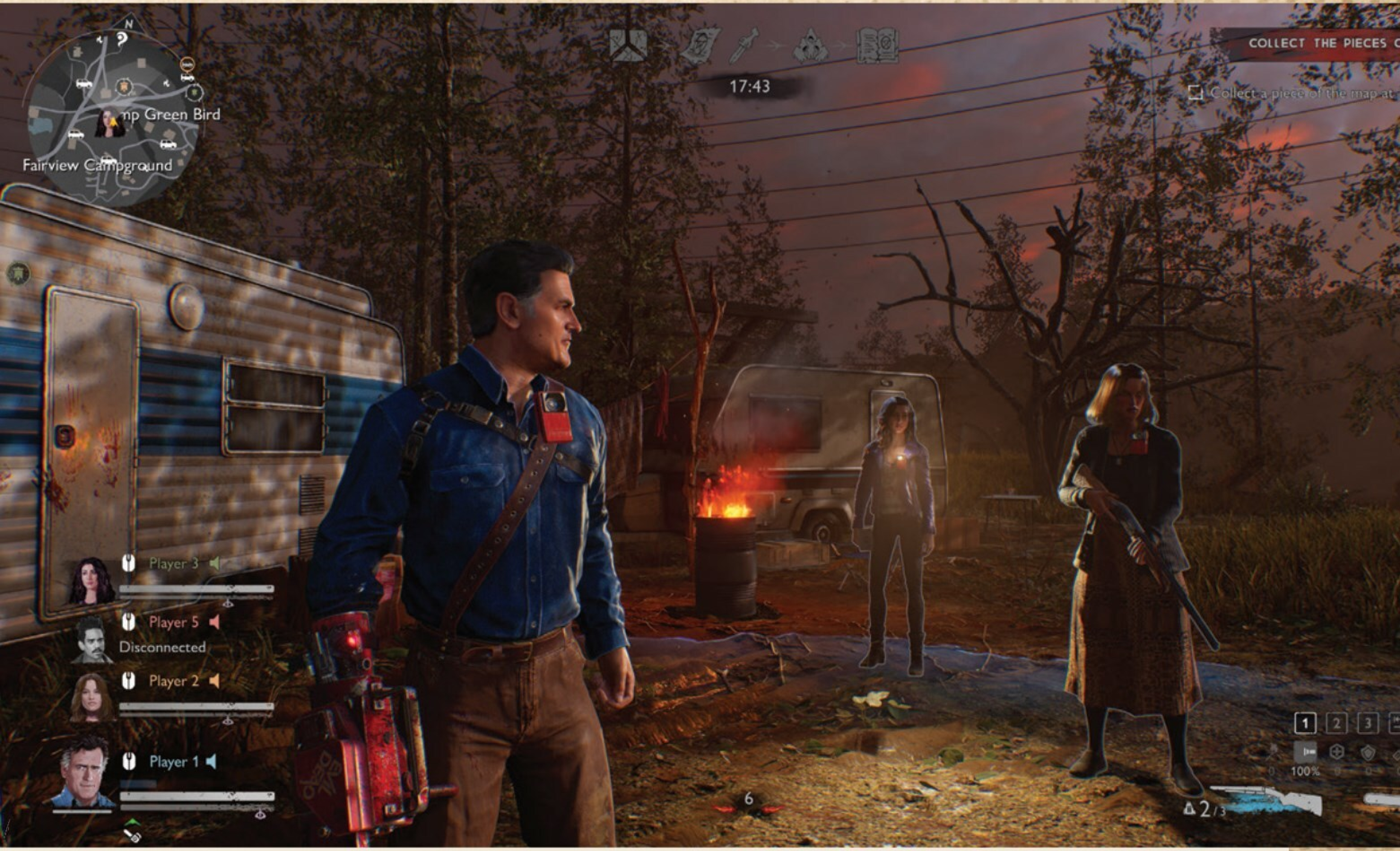
## HEADING TO THE THIRD ACT

While the player-vs-player action of survivor versus Demon is by far the core of the game experience, there are a few bonus modes available for fun and to flesh out the *Evil Dead* universe. Solo missions give players a method to unlock new cosmetics and dive into the esoteric Knowby tapes, offering a glimpse of what was said in pieces that were cut off on the screen. And if you don't feel like going up against a wily player, you can fill a game with AI and play a standard match by yourself. It's all about options, so players can pick whatever experience suits their needs.

Evil Dead: The Game arrives on May 13, and I can't wait to cause some demonic mischief with Eligos in a live environment. Asymmetrical titles are challenging to perfect, but this one looks groovy right now. ■

*For more on Evil Dead: The Game, including an exclusive rapid-fire interview with Bruce Campbell, exclusive gameplay videos, breakdowns, and more, visit GameInformer.com/EvilDead*


Road Bridge
Payne Manor
onic Treehouse
24:26
COLLECT THE PIECES OF THE MAP
Collect a piece of the map at Fishing Village
Cheryl Willi...
Ash Williams...
Annie Knowby
Player 1
4
7/15


N
mp Green Bird
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17:43
COLLECT THE PIECES O
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Player 3
Player 5
Disconnected
Player 2
Player 1
6
100%
2/3

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# DELIGHTFULLY SKEWED

Asymmetrical multiplayer games to check out before 2022's new releases

**BY JILL GRODT**

Evil Dead: The Game graces the cover of our magazine this month, and to celebrate, we're shining the spotlight on the asymmetrical multiplayer genre. This category features games where two groups face each other, but each side has unique, sometimes wildly disproportionate skills and goals. As evidenced by many upcoming titles, the genre has seen a recent resurgence. You can find our preview for IllFonic's newly revealed Ghostbuster title on page 64, and a quick look at the upcoming Dragon Ball: The Breakers in this list. But there's also no shortage of asymmetrical titles you can jump into right now if you want to hone your skills in anticipation of our cover game.

EXIT
DANGER
RIDDEN

## BACK 4 BLOOD VERSUS MODE

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**PUBLISHER** Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
**DEVELOPER** Turtle Rock Studios **RELEASE** October 8, 2021 **RATING** M

As a spiritual successor to Left 4 Dead created by original developer Turtle Rock Studios, Back 4 Blood's Versus Mode channels its forebearer. The recent mode lacks some of the old spark, and doesn't include a campaign component, but you still get to play as Ridden.

## PREDATOR: HUNTING GROUNDS

**PLATFORM** PS5 • PS4 • PC
**PUBLISHER** PlayStation Studios **DEVELOPER** IllFonic
**RELEASE** April 24, 2020 **RATING** M

Become the titular threat from the *Predator* movies and hunt your friends down one by one. The four-player human team is ready for war with a pack of weapons, but they must contend with the alien's arsenal, which includes heat-sensing vision and cloaking abilities.

# DEAD BY DAYLIGHT

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • Stadia • PC • iOS • Android
**PUBLISHER** Behaviour Interactive **DEVELOPER** Behaviour Interactive
**RELEASE** June 14, 2016 **RATING** M

It's hard to talk asymmetrical multiplayers without Dead by Daylight. Released nearly six years ago, the game is still a genre favorite and is on its 23rd chapter. Players split into two teams; one consists of a Killer, and the other, four Survivors. The characters on both sides are inspired by pop culture, including a few you'll see in our cover story. If you don't want to wait for Evil Dead: The Game, this is the next best thing.

**QUICK TAKE**

Dead by Daylight's massive wealth of options in terms of what perks and addons you want to take into every mini horror film match makes the experience drastically different every single time. It creates a varied experience that's a blast to experiment with over and over, even when you might hold on to a *Ringu* videotape for too long. - **DANIEL TACK**

# RESIDENT EVIL RESISTANCE

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**PUBLISHER** Capcom **DEVELOPER** NeoBards Entertainment, Capcom
**RELEASE** April 3, 2020 **RATING** M

You and three friends can join the Resistance in Resident Evil 3's online multiplayer mode. Get through all three stages set before you by the fifth member of the group, who plays the role of a faceless Umbrella Corporation Mastermind – made harder by the ever-present risk of zombies.

# INTRUDER

**PLATFORM** PC **PUBLISHER** Superboss Creations
**DEVELOPER** Superboss Creations
**RELEASE** TBA (Early Access March 2, 2019) **RATING** M

Intruder is still in Early Access, but the five-on-five, spy-vs-guards title is fully playable. Inspired by Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell, Intruder is all about stealth, with one faction using every available stratagem and gadget to get past their fellow players, the guards.

## TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX SIEGE

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER** Ubisoft Montreal
**RELEASE** November 26, 2015 **RATING** M

The number of teammates begins the same at the start of a 5v5 Rainbow Six Siege match, but that inevitably changes as each operator mercilessly uses their unique abilities to eliminate their opponents. The result is a unique and intense asymmetrical struggle.

## PROPNIGHT

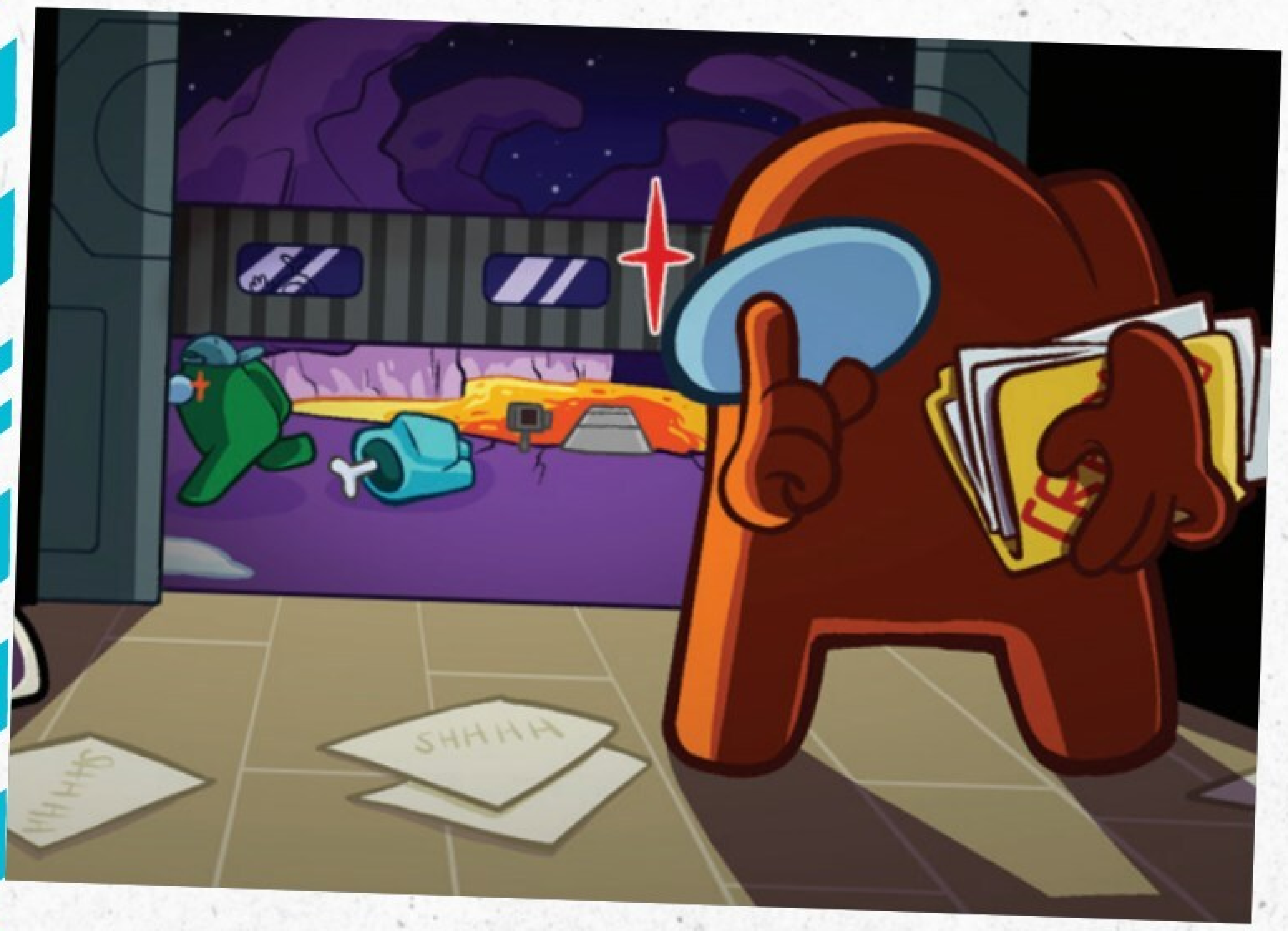
**PLATFORM** PC **PUBLISHER** Mytona
**DEVELOPER** Fntastic
**RELEASE** November 30, 2021 **RATING** N/A

More lighthearted in tone, Propnight's team of four Survivors can transform into inanimate objects to escape notice. At first glance, the killer is still frightening, but it's hard to spark fear in the opposing team as you chase after a sentient barrel or wobbling child's toy.

## LEFT 4 DEAD 2 VERSUS MODE

**PLATFORM** Xbox Series X/S • Xbox One • Xbox 360 • PC **PUBLISHER** Valve **DEVELOPER** Valve
**RELEASE** November 17, 2009 **RATING** M

The Left 4 Dead series drops players into a zombie apocalypse, and while single-player pits the player against the horrific Infected hordes, this asymmetric mode allows you to take a turn as the monsters. Versus asks four survivors to locate a safe room before the player-controlled Infected can pick them off. At the end of each round, the two teams swap places, giving everyone a chance to play both hunted and hunter.



## AMONG US

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC • iOS • Android
**PUBLISHER** InnerSloth **DEVELOPER** InnerSloth
**RELEASE** June 15, 2018 **RATING** E10+

Social deception games recently garnered interest due to the unexpected popularity of one title: Among Us. The game sets up a struggle between a spaceship's unsuspecting Crewmates and predatory alien Imposters. To win, the Crewmates must identify each would-be murderer and eject them into the cold vastness of space before the Imposters can cut all the innocent astronauts down.

## SECRET NEIGHBOR: HELLO NEIGHBOR MULTIPLAYER

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Stadia • PC
**PUBLISHER** tinyBuild **DEVELOPER** Hologryph, Eerie Guest Studios
**RELEASE** October 24, 2019 **RATING** T

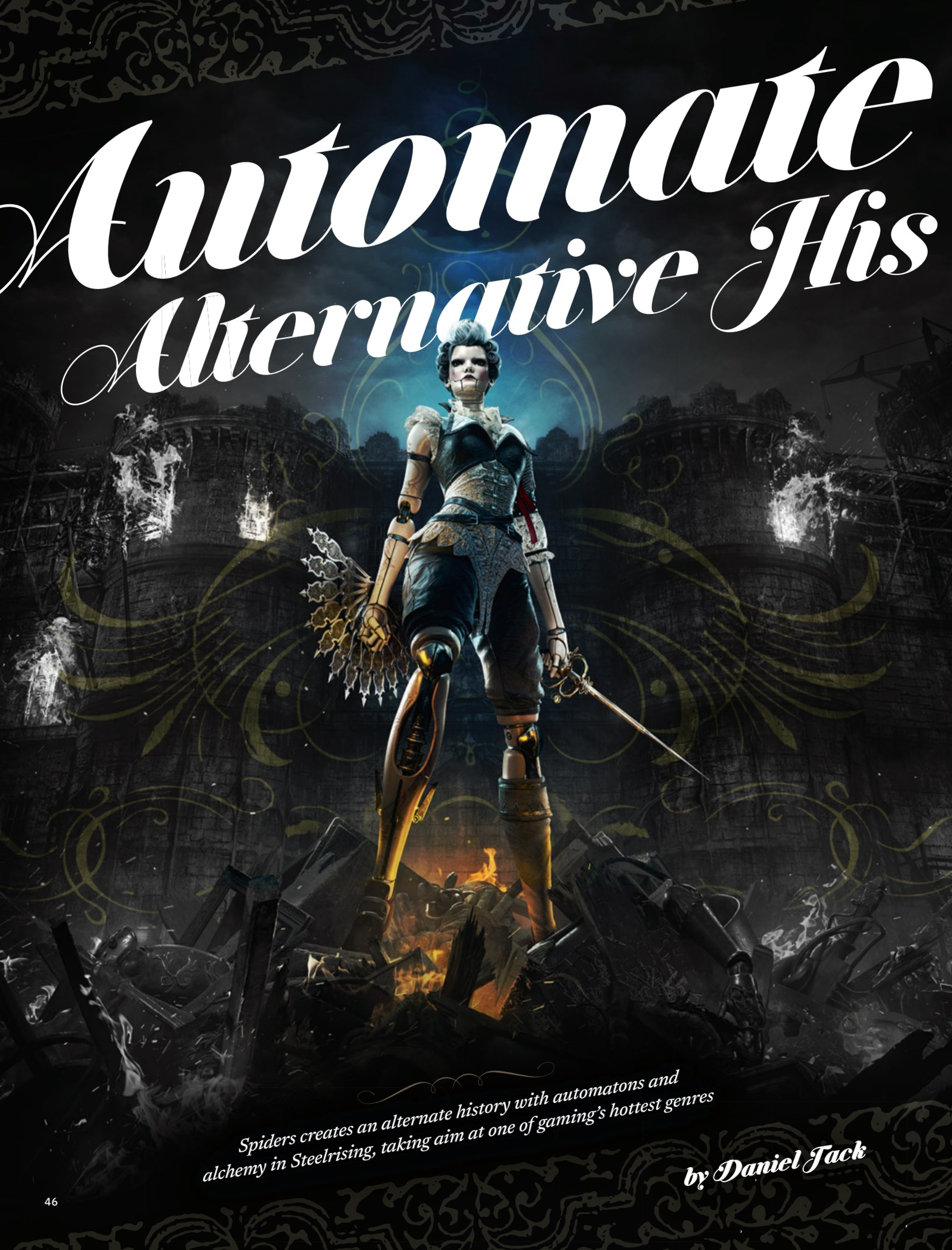
In this multiplayer spin-off of the popular games, you and your teammates break into the suspicious house next door, trying to rescue a friend from its locked basement. However, one of your companions is the Neighbor in disguise, intent on trapping you in the home forever. ■

# BUT WAIT, THERE'S ONE MORE

## DRAGON BALL: THE BREAKERS

Evil Dead: The Game isn't the only asymmetrical multiplayer set to release in 2022. Fans can also look forward to Dragon Ball: The Breakers. Like a lot of games on this list, the title gives players the chance to experience a well-known IP in a different way. However, contrary to many of its counterparts, the upcoming game isn't rooted in horror, which opens the door for a different audience to jump into the fray. But just because Dragon Ball: The Breakers doesn't feel like a slasher movie doesn't mean it's without tension. The 7v1 online experience makes one player an established baddie from the animated series, like Cell, Buu, or Frieza. This raider from another timeline becomes increasingly stronger as the game goes on. That will be a problem for the other players who inhabit the role of ordinary human beings, just trying to escape from the super-powered foe. Time is against the larger team, and there's no way to fight back. Dragon Ball: The Breakers requires the human group to use brain against brawn if they want to live.

# Automate Alternative His



*Spiders creates an alternate history with automatons and alchemy in Steelrising, taking aim at one of gaming's hottest genres*

**by Daniel Jack**

# d tory

French development studio Spiders has been crafting RPG worlds for years, bringing players futuristic adventures with The Technomancer, classic fantasy with Bound By Flame, and fascinating explorations with Greedfall. Now, Spiders heads to a spectacular vision of Paris where automatons hold oppressive sway. While the robot revolution is hardly historical, this vastly different take on the French Revolution tasks players with controlling an automaton named Aegis as she attempts to navigate the conflict. Spiders aims to take its role-playing past and infuse it with a healthy dose of modern-day action combat with this new adventure. We took a deep dive into the new project to discover what's in store.

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**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Nacon
**DEVELOPER** Spiders Studio **RELEASE** September 8

## ALTERING ANTIQUITY

With a twisted take on the French Revolution, Steelrising presents an alternative history filled with automatons and alchemy in this over-the-top vision of Paris, France. In a world where automatons do everything from taking out the trash to dancing for entertainment, things have gone terribly wrong, and it falls on you to bring resolution to a ravaged, overrun city.

With a combination of RPG elements and precise combat (where actions by both the player and enemy can leave them open to attack), Spiders is going all-in on the creation of a wild universe. Steelrising doesn't feature an open world to explore, but there's a lot more than a linear road from point A to point Z. Throughout the game Aegis can acquire a wide variety of tool augmentations, such as a grappling hook, that open up access to different areas. These explorative addons encourage players to head back through the city and discover previously inaccessible regions throughout a playthrough, especially if they get stuck on a deadly boss. Of course, "grinding" is also an option, allowing players to harvest resources from destroyed opponents and enhance their character, including adding stat points to core attributes such as health and attack power.

"It's a mix. In fact, you will find the usual mechanics of RPGs. So, of course, equipment, skills, and attributes. But we really wanted to use the fact that our character is an automaton to introduce some specificities to that," says Spiders founder and CEO Jehanne Rousseau. "So you can also add new modules into your body to change or improve some aspects, improve some skills, all your weapons will come out of your own body. In fact, when you equip the weapons, they are really coming out of your hands, for example."

Each level of the game is based around a specific Paris neighborhood. Things won't look exactly the same in this machine-driven world compared to the real historical locales, but those with knowledge of the famous city will recognize key landmarks, streets, and more. Artistic liberty has been taken across the board to ensure various exciting environments, especially when it comes to verticality. Your automaton can traverse the game in many directions. Jumping, climbing through buildings, and grappling around are just a few examples of how Aegis can interact quickly with the environment.

While the city may be vastly different, many of the French Revolution's historical figures are featured as NPCs, offering you quests or selling supplies. They may offer you quests or sell you supplies. In Steelrising, you may go from smashing some massive robot foes to immediately taking on a task from Marie Antoinette. While you won't be battling any humans, the developers created an all-star alternate-universe cast to make the journey more enjoyable. Of course, not all characters are torn from the history books, and Aegis will interact with some fictional characters as well.

## BOLSTERING THE ACTION WITH STORY AND STAKES

While timeline accuracy isn't all that important in this world, many of the game's automatons take inspiration from the 18th century. Clockmakers and tinkerers, mainly from Sweden and Germany, had created rudimentary robots that could play the piano, write, and draw. Those early technologies led to some initial brainstorming for Aegis and the rest of the automatons.

The player's choices across the game and interactions with various characters affect the story and eventual outcome. While the core story will be easy to understand and follow, Spiders wants to tap into environmental storytelling to give players a sense of atmosphere.

"There's still a great amount of environmental storytelling, particularly because the game mostly takes place in one night and after Paris has already been laid to waste. And so you're walking through not just an everyday Paris, but a war-torn Paris," says localization lead Ciaran Cresswell. "And so there are scenes of destruction everywhere. There's also more traditional upfront storytelling with a good amount of dialogue, though less than Greedfall."

## THE DIFFICULTY DILEMMA

When you die to a random robo-soldier or a big boss, you drop your currency at the spot of death. You'll need to trek back to pick them up on your next respawn, or they'll be lost forever. This once-bizarre gaming foible popularized by other titles has made its way into various games and creates push-pull tension in Steelrising. Inevitably some of the core mechanics surrounding modern action/RPGs turn the conversation to difficulty and whether or not players can modify their experience. Steelrising won't feature a difficulty slider, but it will have an assist mode that will help players looking to take the edge off the challenge.

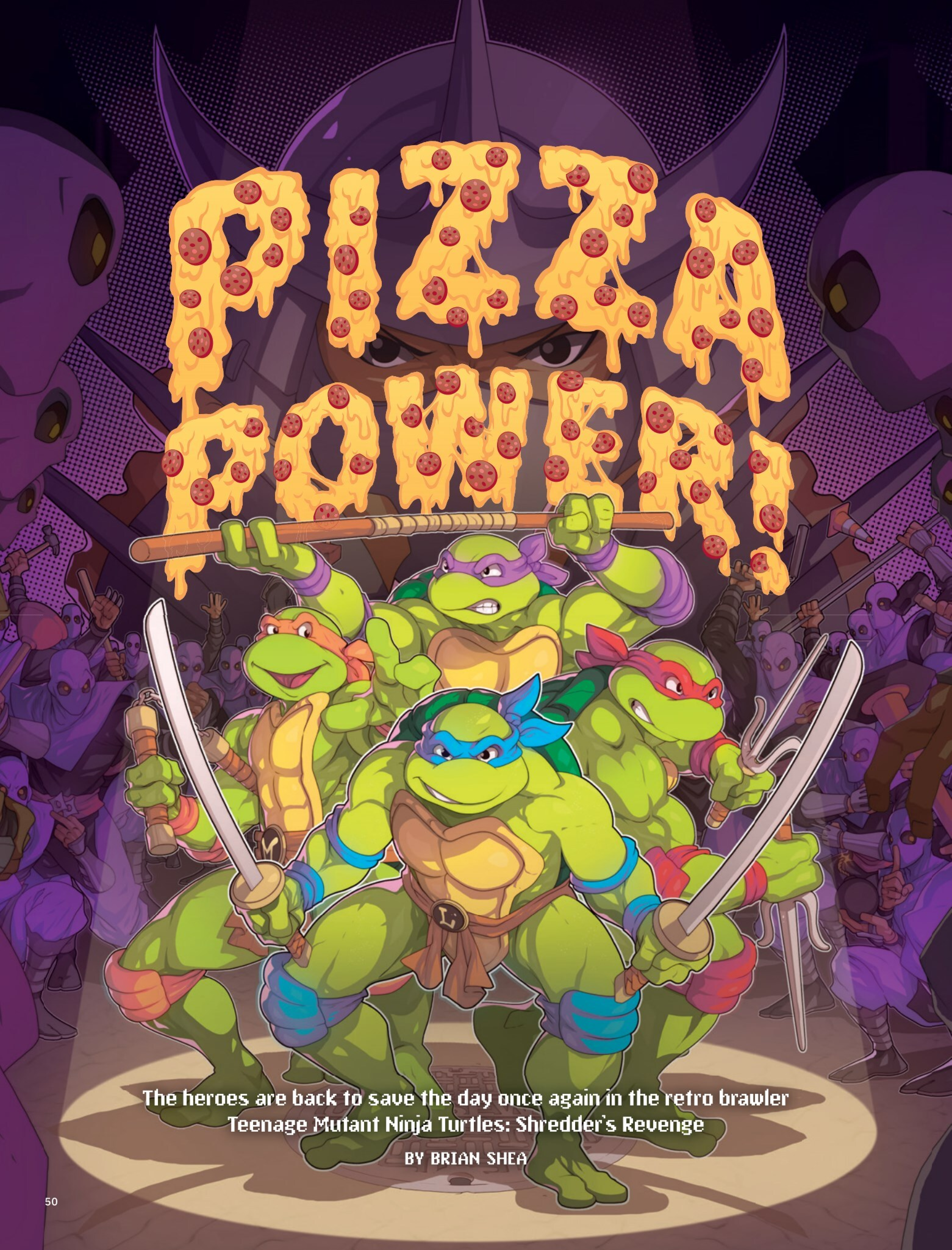
"We honestly really thought about it, too," Rousseau says. "And we wanted to create a kind of assist mode or something that would allow more freedom. If you're a regular player of challenging games, you will be able to enjoy the game. So it's brutal, but if you want to enjoy more story elements, if you want to spend some time to discover the environments, we are actually developing the kind of assist system model. I can't tell you much about it, because we're still working on it, but it's something that we thought was really important, mostly because coming from our previous games, we were grateful to have some feedback that some players were still finding the game too difficult, and wanted to enjoy the discovery of the world. So we said, 'Okay, we need to do something for these players,' because we feel that they need to to be able to discover without suffering too much."

## WILD WEAPONS AND AUXILARY ALCHEMY

Aegis has many options to employ, from speedy weapons to hulking brute possibilities. However, whatever you choose, there's still some element of grace in combat – after all, Aegis was constructed as a dancer. Like the rest of the automatons in this world, Aegis's role was different before everything collapsed into destruction. From rank-and-file foes to bosses, many of the enemies you fight had some other function before the revolution, such as cooking and gardening bots. There's a reasonable degree of variation from humanoid models to more bizarre creations. In one early video, we see a battle against a boss known as the Bishop, which features a frenzied mix of dashing, attacking, and timing with windows of opportunity for high power takedown techniques. It's a pretty standard encounter involving learning and exploitation of timing but provides an idea of what we can expect in these encounters.

In addition to your integrated weaponry, the world of Steelrising also includes alchemical pursuits that can add special effects to your attacks or provide you with some exciting combat outside of the speedy swings and staggering blows. Is alchemy just a fancy way to put a form of magic in a game without it? Probably, but the strangely scientific slant fits the setting while providing players with some specialty options to go alongside core combat. Instead of enchanting your weapon with magic, you coat it with chemicals. If you're expecting Aegis to strap a rocket launcher on as part of her kit, forget it – but don't count out things that would make sense in the period, such as muskets or forms of hand cannons.

Will Spiders be able to carve out a chunk of the rapidly-growing action/RPG genre? We'll find out later this year when the game's released on September 8. Until then, the prospects of old-timey robotic mayhem and alternate timelines will have to tide us over. ■



# PIZZA POWER!

The heroes are back to save the day once again in the retro brawler Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge

BY BRIAN SHEA

In the 1990s, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were ubiquitous in the side-scrolling beat-'em-up scene. Whether you're talking about the 1989 arcade game, 1991's Turtles in Time, or the myriad other brawlers starring everybody's favorite Heroes in a Half-Shell, Konami's creations in the '80s and '90s are legendary.

However, just as the side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre faded, so too did the luster of the Turtles' legacy. Following the IP's late-'80s/early-'90s boom, the fan base of TMNT shrunk considerably, and much like the movies, TV shows, and merchandise, the brand's gaming output slowed. After 1992's Hyperstone Heist and 1993's Tournament Fighters, the Turtles still starred in games, but few reached any level of acclaim. Even Ubisoft's 2009 remake of Turtles in Time was met with harsh criticism.

Now, with talent that worked on games like Scott Pilgrim vs. The World, Streets of Rage 4, and the well-liked 2007 TMNT for Game Boy Advance, Dotemu and Tribute Games hope to restore the cowabunga kings to their former gaming glory. We met with the companies behind Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge to see the game in action and chat with the developers about how they're hoping to make the video game Turtles fans have dreamt of for the past 30 years.

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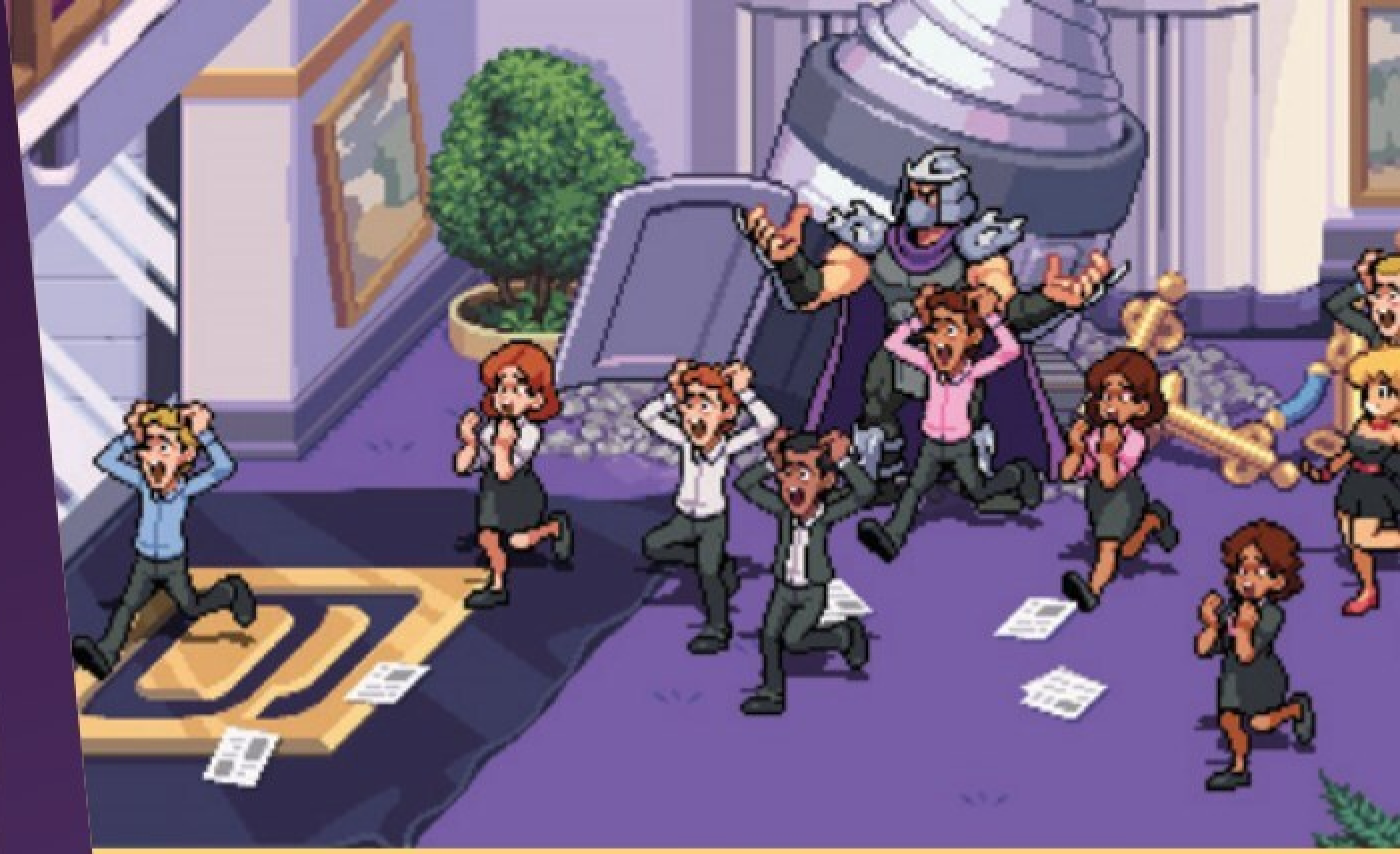
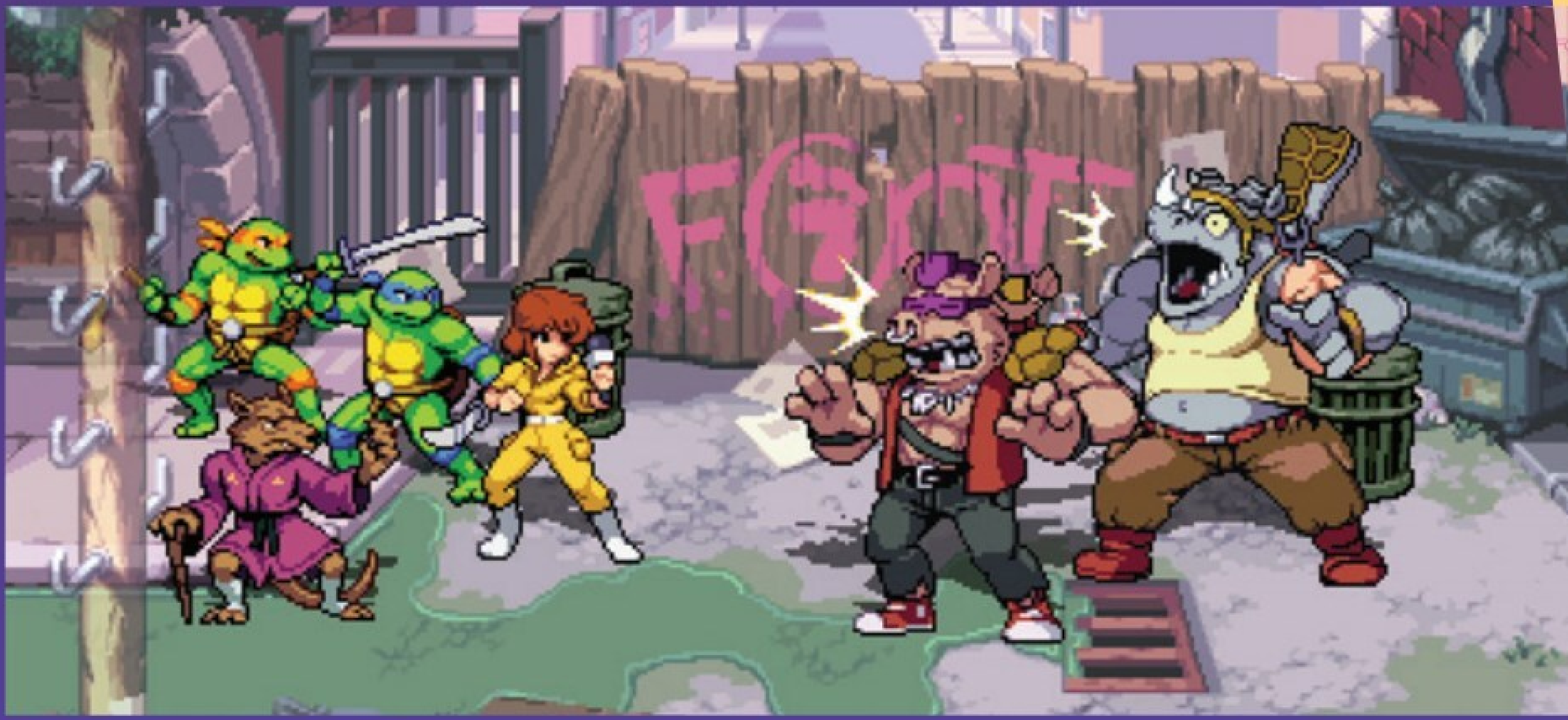
**PLATFORM** PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC **STYLE** 1 to 4-Player Action (Online TBA)
**PUBLISHER** Dotemu **DEVELOPER** Tribute Games **RELEASE** 2022

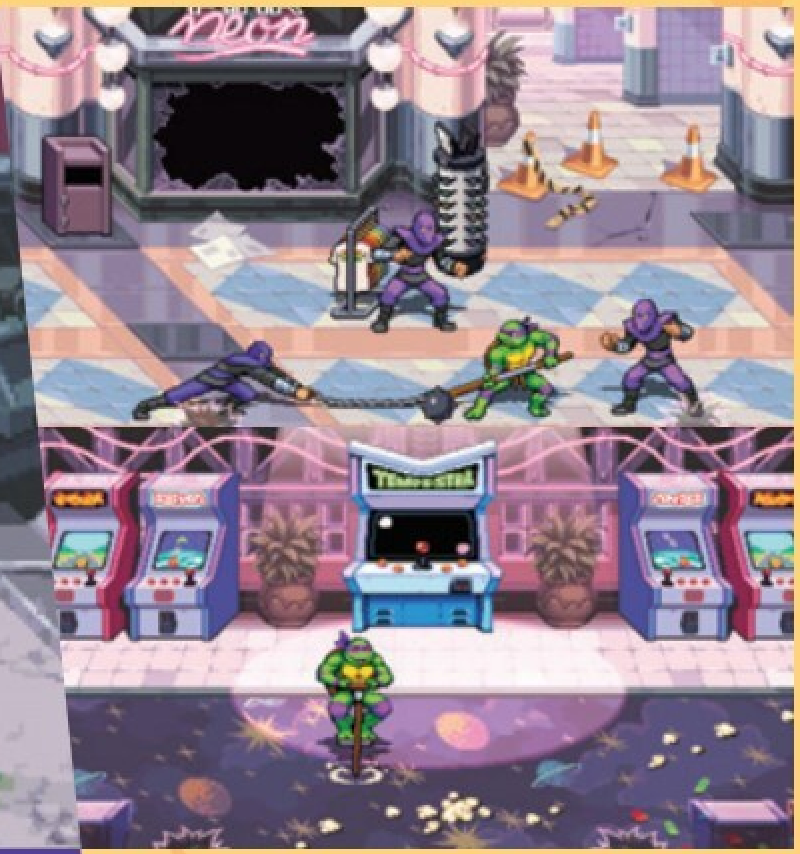


## WHEN THE EVIL SHREDDER ATTACKS ...

Announced through a trailer featuring Faith No More's Mike Patton singing the 1987 cartoon theme song, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge is designed to appeal to fans from that earlier era. So much about the game – the aesthetics, character designs, enemies, and more – pull heavily from the period, including the beloved TV series and its accompanying toy lines.

During my demo, I watch members of Dotemu and Tribute Games play through three full stages. The first stage, "Jaw-Breaking News," takes place inside the Channel 6 News studio. It's here that Shredder begins his plot for revenge, part of which includes the reassembly of Krang. In keeping with the cartoon inspiration, each stage plays out like a single TV show episode, telling a story through the environment, enemies, boss fights, and short cutscenes between stages. The music, composed by Tee Lopes of Sonic Mania fame, also feels ripped straight out of the '80s and '90s.



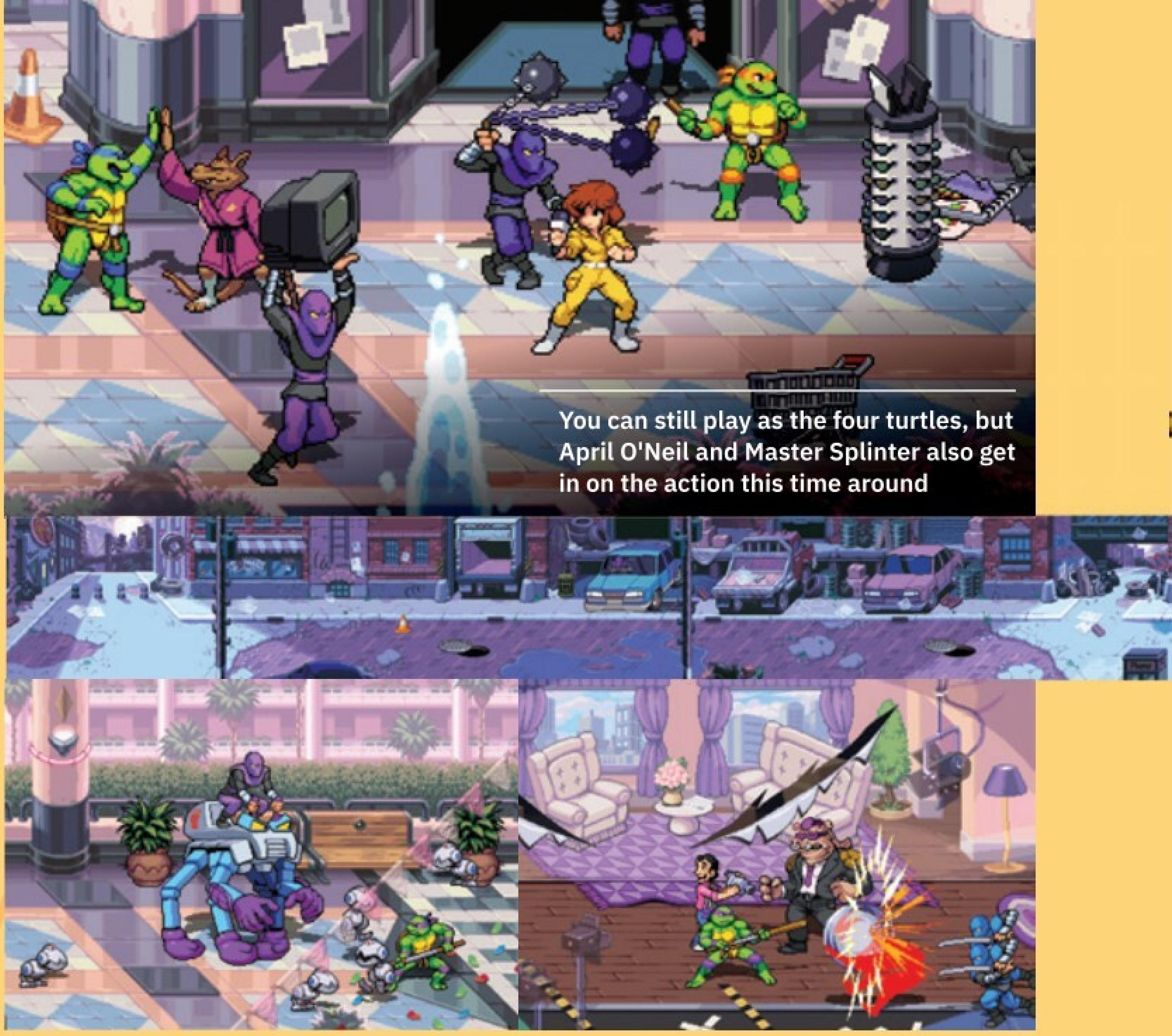


That era of inspiration carries through in the gameplay, with fast, arcade-style action. Enemies arrive on screen and are vanquished just as fast as they show up. Just like in Turtles in Time, players can slam enemies back and forth and even toss them towards the camera.

This game may be all about the nostalgia, but Tribute wants to deliver more than just a greatest-hits package to fans. “Something that we wanted to do mostly with the game is try to visit locations that we have never seen before in previous 2D games, but also things from the 1987 TMNT universe from the cartoon,” game designer Frédéric Gémus says. “It’s a love letter not only to the TMNT franchise, but also to the whole era.”

Despite its nostalgic nature, Shredder’s Revenge implements many quality-of-life improvements. For instance, chaining together attacks is more fluid than in the classic games, and in co-op, players have a window where they can revive knocked-down teammates.

Shredder’s Revenge also offers two modes of play: standard arcade and story mode. Arcade mode is meant to replicate the experiences of the classic games where you begin with a limited number of lives and you need to beat the game in a single sitting. Story mode flips the script, allowing character progression by trading your accumulated points for upgrades to HP, extra lives, new moves, and a special Radical Mode ability that temporarily powers up your character. Story mode also lets you complete optional challenges within stages, offering replayability and the option to backtrack to each stage.



You can still play as the four turtles, but April O’Neil and Master Splinter also get in on the action this time around

## HEROES IN A HALF-SHELL

While the first level is full of Easter eggs, the next stage I see (the sixth level in the game), “Mall Meltdown,” further commits to the nostalgia. Fighting through the mall, players are treated to a plethora of nods to the mall culture of the time. Eventually, Donatello and April O’Neil fight through the food court and shopping promenades to arrive at the arcade.

While the first level featured Bebop, a familiar face for anyone who’s played through the Turtles’ past games, as its boss battle, this level gives players a foe who hasn’t appeared in a game before. Tempestra is a character who escaped from a video game with which Leonardo became obsessed in a 1990 episode of the cartoon, so her appearance in the mall arcade of Shredder’s Revenge makes sense.

In this boss battle, the virtual sorceress summons digital projections of Tokka and Rahzar from *The Secret of the Ooze*. Once you defeat the mutant snapping turtle and wolf, Tempestra becomes vulnerable to attack. After repeating this cycle a few times, Tempestra is defeated, and the mall is safe.

The final stage I see is the 10th level in the game, called “A Few Screws Loose.” Here, players battle through a back alley and into an electronics store full of tube TVs and mousers galore. This time, Raphael goes it alone. Co-op is drop-in/drop-out, and whenever the player count changes, the game adapts in real-time, adjusting the enemy compositions on the fly if you decide to suddenly invite three friends into the mix.

In one memorable section, Raph takes on several enemies on opposing conveyor belts. The dynamic footing and the fact that new smashable items are constantly arriving on screen adds new layers to the encounter. While the mouser infestation might lead you to believe the boss battle is against their inventor, Baxter Stockman, the climax of this electronics expedition is against an additional robotic rogue: Metalhead.

Shredder’s techno-turtle has a similar moveset as the version players faced in Turtles in Time, complete with arms that can stretch across the screen and flying kicks. He’s also joined by a menagerie of mousers and can shield himself while launching rockets your way. Metalhead’s moves don’t pose much of a threat to the player, and before long, the robot is out of commission, and Raph is eating a slice of pizza off his sai as my demo ends.

# RADICAL MOVES!

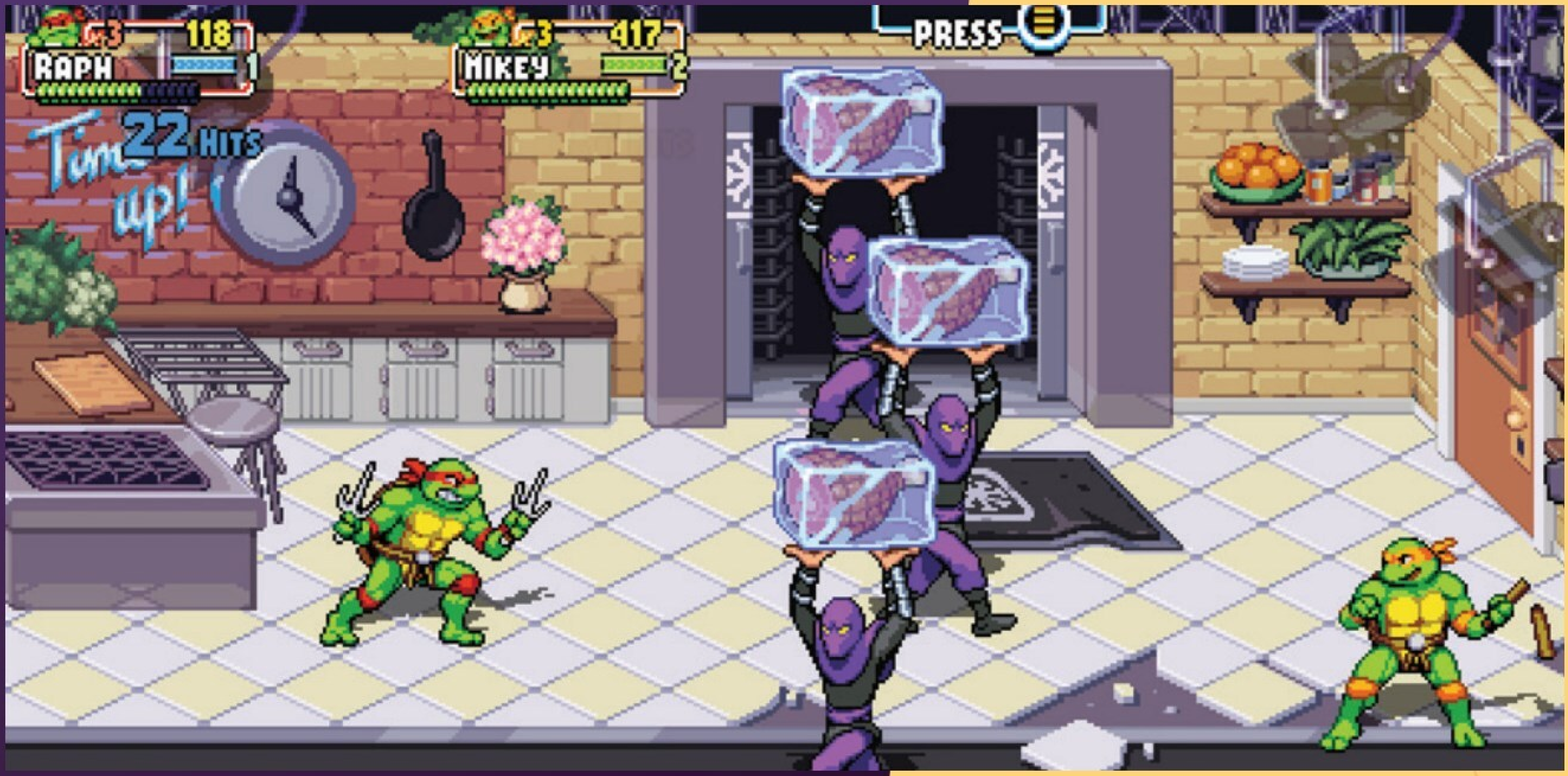
In Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge, players select from one of six playable characters: Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo, Raphael, April O'Neil, and Master Splinter. Each character has their own distinct moveset, attacks, and gameplay feel. One of the key differentiating factors between the characters is their individual special moves.

In the classic games, players had to sacrifice a portion of their health bar to execute a special attack. With Shredder's Revenge, players fill a special attack bar by landing consecutive attacks. This change is meant to encourage players to be more active and involved with the gameplay while also removing the punishment aspect of losing health for using a special attack. Each character now has three special attacks: a ground special, an air special, and a flying kick special.

## COWABUNGA!

Everything I've seen and learned of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge suggests that it aims to be the brand's grand re-entry to the gaming scene. It's clear the teams at Dotemu and Tribute Games have abundant love for both the Turtles franchise and the side-scrolling brawler genre.

After watching the team play through the three stages, I immediately got the itch to replay my favorites, like Turtles in Time. Thankfully, through the recently announced Cowabunga Collection (learn more on p. 72), I'll have the opportunity to refresh my memory and brush up on my skills as I get ready for the launch of Shredder's Revenge later this year. ■



# UNGUIDED INTO DARKNESS

## Real-life horrors set the foundation for a supernatural journey into the locked-away land of *Hell is Us*

**BY JOHN CARSON**

Hell is Us represents a big step for Montréal-based studio Rogue Factor and creative director Jonathan Jacques-Belletête. It's the developer's first original IP after releasing Mordheim: City of the Damned and Necromunda: Underhive Wars, stepping out from the massive Warhammer license, creating something the team can call its own. Jacques-Belletête departed Eidos Montréal after spending just short of 12 years with the company, where he found success as the art director on Deus Ex: Human Revolution and Mankind Divided and had just completed the art direction design for Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy before leaving. Now stepping into an even bigger role to develop Hell is Us, he is shaping the vision of this dark new adventure.

I recently spoke with Jacques-Belletête about the new project, an action/RPG with a realistic conflict setting the stage for a calamity with paranormal ramifications. We discussed the narrative's dark underlying themes, the main character and his connection to the world, and how the team wants to make experiences players can explore without the game handing you all of the answers.

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action/Role-Playing
**PUBLISHER** Nacon **DEVELOPER** Rogue Factor **RELEASE** TBA

## Finding Home Again

The main character of Hell is Us, who Rogue Factor hasn't officially revealed yet, was born in the unnamed country at the center of the story. Jacques-Belletête says this nation, surrounded by mountains, has largely been isolated from the rest of the world for close to 2,000 years. It was labeled a hermit state at the creation of the United Nations following World War II. Fast forward to the 1990s when Hell is Us takes place, and the country is ruled by the "iron fist" of a dictator.

The developers chose the '90s because it was a time of turmoil in several nations around the world such as Kosovo, Bosnia, and Rwanda, whose people faced armed conflicts, wars for independence, and genocide. "The main theme of the game is that human violence and barbarity is basically a perpetual cycle that's largely fueled by human emotions and human passions," Jacques-Belletête says. "Like, the cause of our worst atrocities and our worst miseries, right? It's all based on human passions and human emotions."

According to Jacques-Belletête, it's a subject the team doesn't take lightly. But while war and its terrible results are central to the overall tapestry of Hell is Us, it's more a foundation for the battle against supernatural beings, which surface as the game's main aggressor.

Jacques-Belletête brings up stories of other territories and nations that have faced similar hardships and went underreported. The topic of discussion briefly changed to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the strife and pain it's causing an entire nation and beyond at the time of writing.

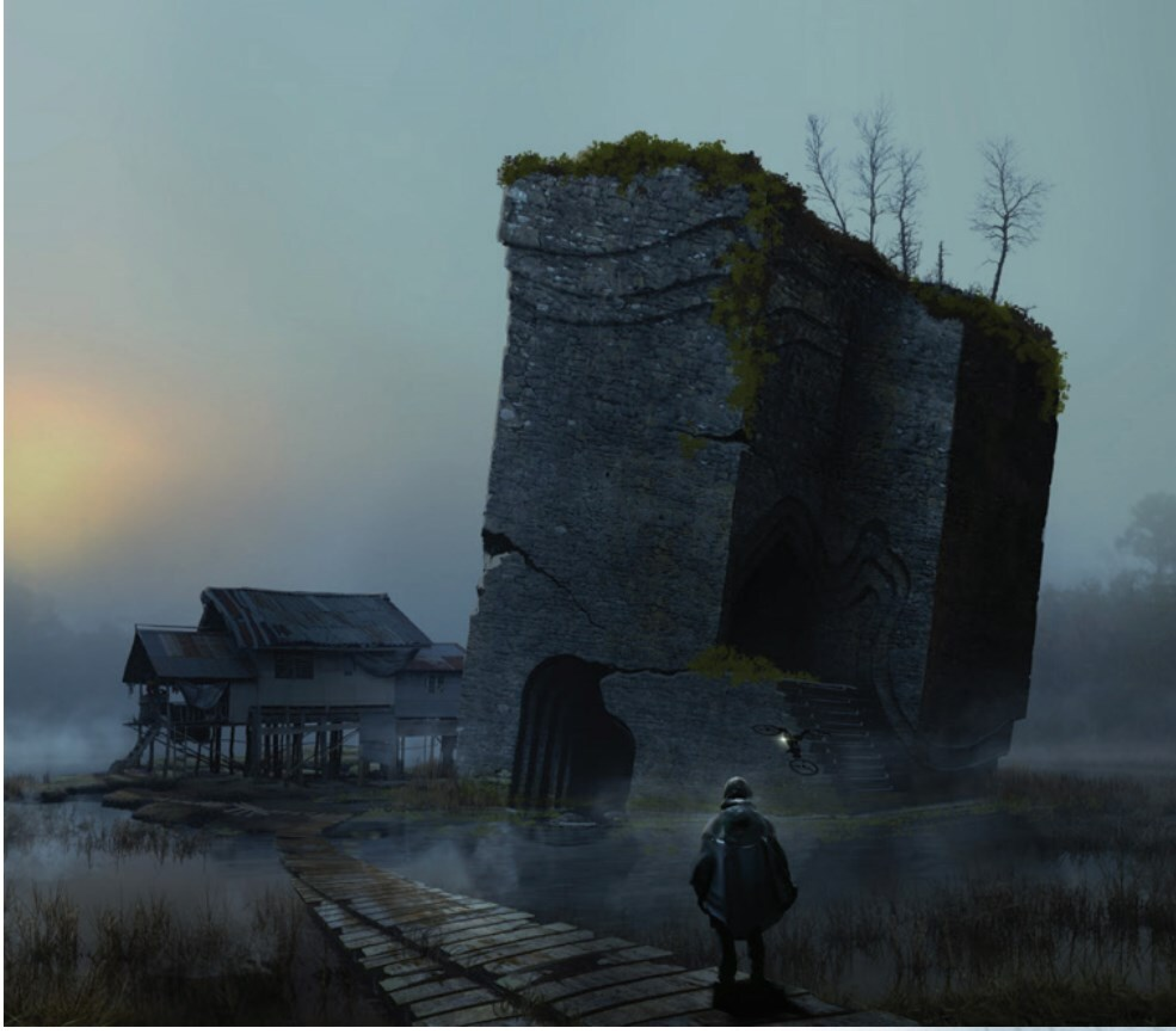
"What is happening in Ukraine right now happens every day, in tons of other places. That's the reality of it. And that's the sad thing of it. This absolute madness and horror, this violence. These are the things we do at each other," he says. "What we don't realize is that this is a reality for so much of that of the population of the Earth. We're so sheltered here. We have no idea what it means. [...] The library of horrors is long."

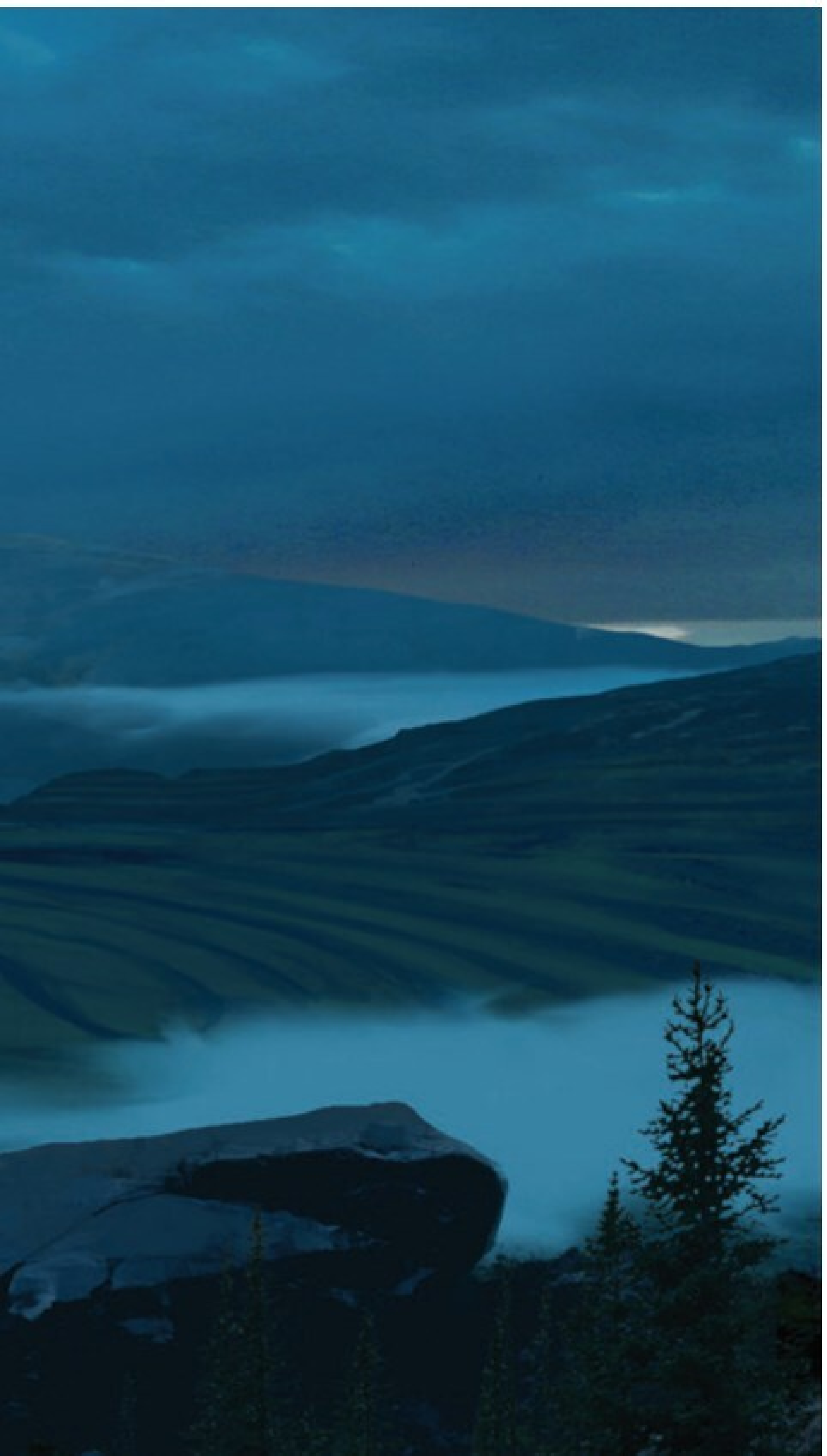
The main character won't be taking a side in the game's ongoing civil war, nor will you be solving the crisis. "One thing's for sure, the game is not about saving the country from the civil war," Jacques-Belletête says. "There's no such thing as, you know, one dude who walks into a civil war situation, and that the ending is, 'I've saved it. I've stopped it myself.' It wouldn't make any sense."

The boy grows up while shuffled around from place to place, filtering through the Canadian foster family system, but never settling on a place or family that feels like home. He finds the structure he was missing from a stable family life after joining the military. While enlisted, he's sent on various peacekeeping missions around the world, often looking for a way back to the hermit state.

In his years away from his homeland, he tries many times to find a way back, futile attempts to meet the parents who gave him away and settle his soul that's burning for answers. Answers for questions like who his parents are, why they abandoned him, and why they smuggled him out of the country. The civil war forms an opportunity, a tiny crack in the country's impenetrable shell. He sees his chance to find his parents and ask them all the questions that have burned inside him for so long.

Learning of a huge squad of peacekeepers being sent to a neighboring country because of the conflict, the man manages to join the mission, not to help, but to slip back into the secretive land in which he was born. "So, he's not part of the units that are allowed to get inside," Jacques-Belletête says. "However, the man plans for this. His scheme is to go AWOL on a moonless night and sneak across the border."





## Finding Adventure In A Forbidden Land

After changing into more adventurous garb, the man steps foot inside his home country for the first time in decades. This is where Hell is Us begins. This protagonist has no idea where to look for his parents or anyone who may know their identity. And little does he know that a supernatural presence has taken hold and will be the true enemy.

Jacques-Belletête wants to leave behind what he calls "silver-plattering." He doesn't want Hell is Us to explicitly offer where to go, who to talk to, or what to see. "We're putting back in the hands of the players the responsibility to figure out not just what they need to do, but also how to do it, how to find it," he says.

He compares this loosening of guidance to a series of discoveries in The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. It begins with an old man telling Link about his missing son who used to play his flute in the forest. Retracing pieces of the story to locations in the world, you can find the stump where the boy would play for the animals and see his spirit playing for the gathered wildlife. Later, after acquiring the flute, you can play it to call on a bird, whisking Link away to different points on the map as the game's clever version of fast travel. Nothing ever tells you to specifically do that but talking to the man, listening to and learning his son's story, and piecing those factors together makes connecting some simple dots into a revelatory moment.

To give players a sense of exploration and discovery, Rogue Factor relies on a balance of environmental design paired with usable information gathered from characters or other means within the world. Jacques-Belletête sees it as a way of propping up the importance of art and level design again, which in his eyes lack purpose in an age of mechanisms that guide players exactly where to go.

"You start realizing that the work of the level designers and the artists, as beautiful as environments can be, they serve no other purpose really than just being pretty," Jacques-Belletête says.

Even the characters giving quests in other games often feel hollow to him, but Rogue Factor is working to make them worth listening to in Hell is Us.

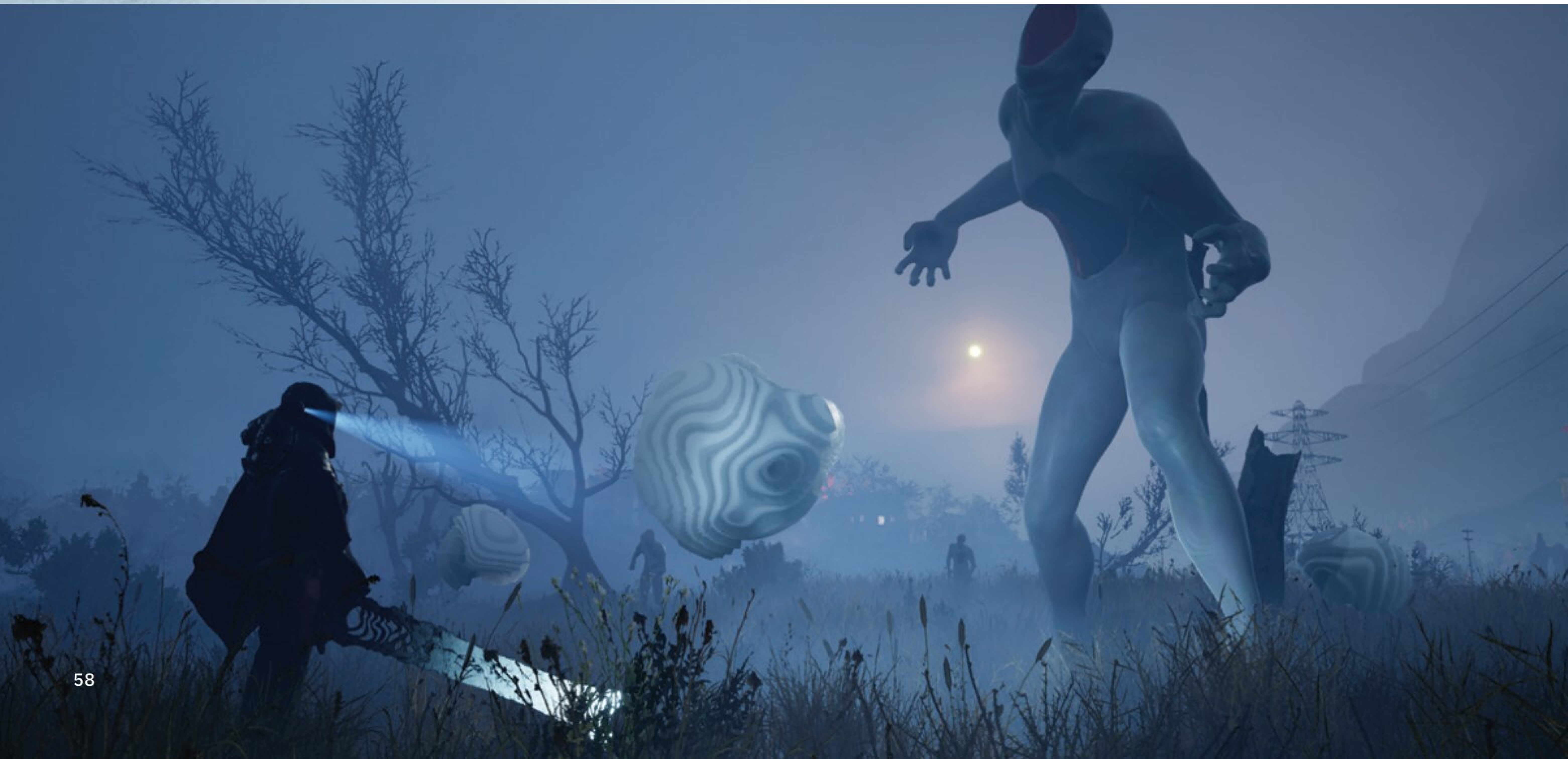
He's hopeful that taking this route will be successful after similar design philosophies have been popular in games like Elden Ring. "People are getting back into this idea of, 'Wait a minute. If the world speaks to me properly, I don't need all these artificial superpowers that RPGs have,'" he says.

## Surviving The Unknown

Taking on the surreal occult horrors found within Hell is Us requires the main character to use weaponry that, in many ways, are not contemporary with the time period. The monsters roaming the land are mysterious and important to the story, though Jacques-Belletête wouldn't reveal much about them other than a brief description of the beings he simply calls "entities." He describes them stylistically as being "almost painterly," and chaotic in the way they move. Some are hulking monstrosities that look as if they are made of ooze, with the substance covering their body alternating between red and black in a spiral pattern. These entities roam the land tethered by what looks like an umbilical cord attached to another creature that's pale and humanoid in shape with empty spaces where parts of their face and abdomen should be.

Modern weaponry like guns or other artillery don't affect these beings, forcing the player to rely on special melee weapons, decidedly ancient armaments, like swords and axes, to deal any kind of damage. These objects of war exude a ghostly glow of unknown origin, but their haunting resonance is likely a reason why it can hurt the entities. That means most combat in Hell is Us is up close and personal. How and why these weapons are effective will be revealed in due time, but just because most modern weaponry won't kill the entities, that doesn't mean some forms of technology don't have a place in the fight against this paranormal threat.

Even though Hell is Us takes place in the 1990s, Rogue Factor is injecting some highly advanced tech with the inclusion of a drone that will assist the main character. Jacques-Belletête compares it to tech in games like Metal Gear Solid 3, a game set firmly in the 1960s, yet its director, Hideo Kojima, chose to incorporate various gadgets and weaponry that were way more advanced than what was possible at the time.



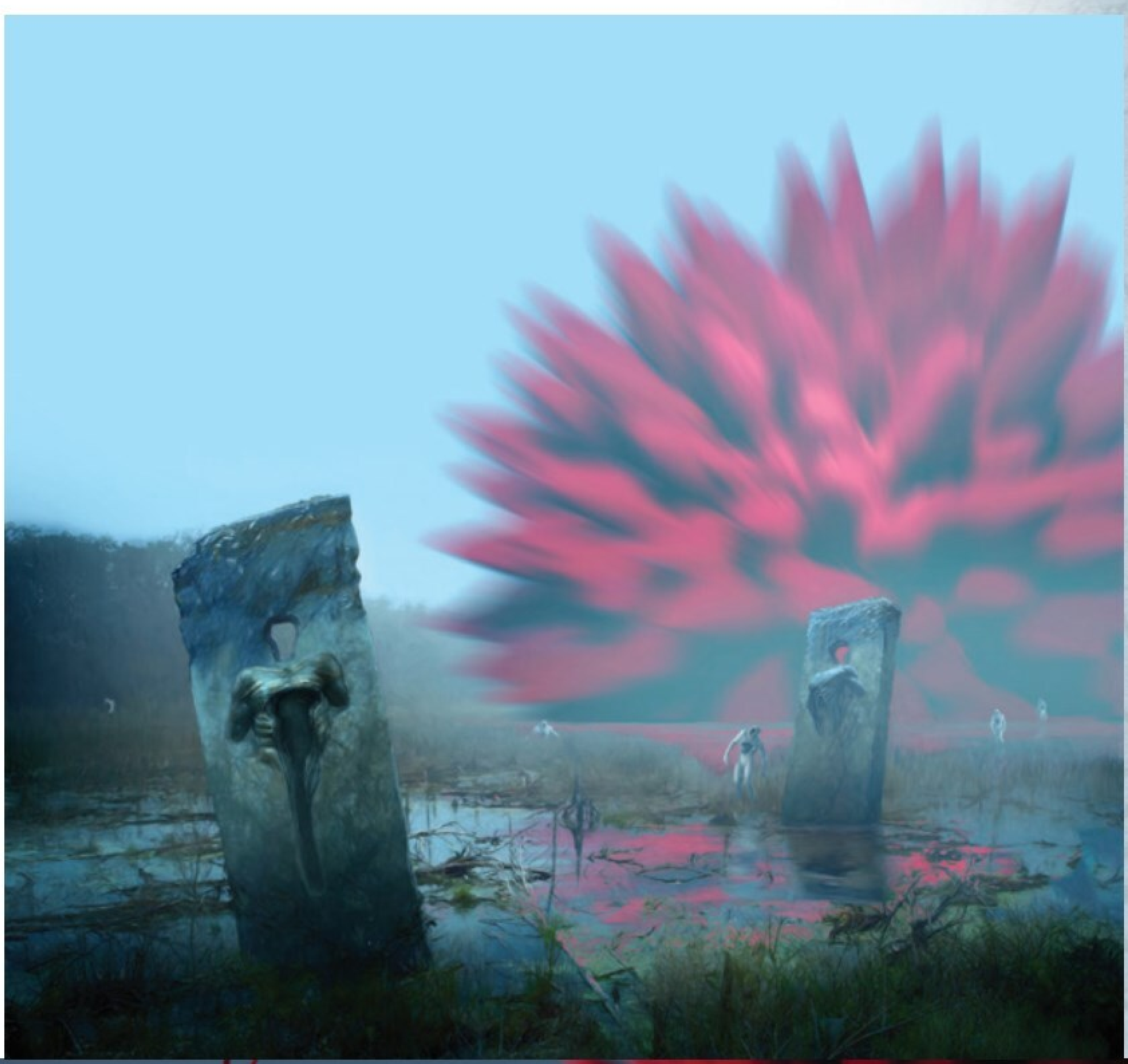
Jacques-Belletête sees the drone the same way. While it may feel ahead of its time, he clarifies that the drones in Hell is Us don't look or act like the quadcopter design that's popular today. The players' first encounter with the drone is when it's found on an enemy, opening even more questions about the world. Who these people are and where the tech originates are only a few of the mysteries surrounding these machines.

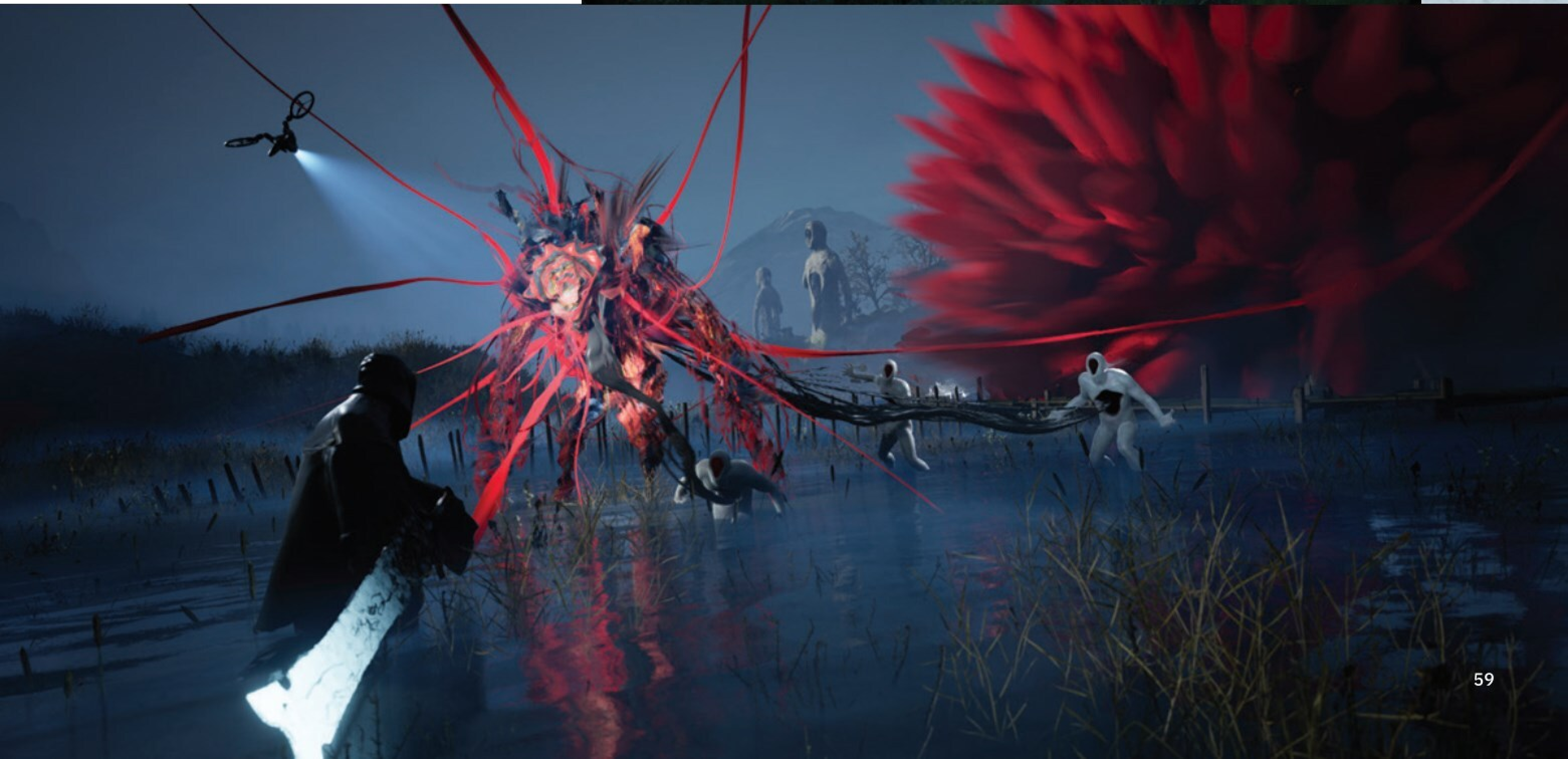
The drone helps to even the odds against the mysterious entities. Because the enemies typically fight in pairs with the chaotic monstrosity and pale humanoid working together as a team, having a drone friend on your side makes the situation more of a fair fight. "Your drone can do all sorts of things to distract one half of the entity while you take care of the other one," Jacques-Belletête says. He also tells me the drone is upgradable with new moves that will further assist in battle.

To travel around the hermit state, players at one point commandeer an armored personnel carrier. This APC serves as a hub, a home, and often a mobile campsite that can usher the player character to different regions. Hell is Us doesn't have a traditional open world, and you must learn about many of the places you'll be able to travel to beforehand. Whether that's information gleaned from a map or gathered through conversation with the locals, a seed of knowledge has to be planted before exploring a new area. It's all about the player's interactions with the world and the choices to explore further in specific directions.

The areas will vary, with some being more compact, while others are wide open lands. There are reasons for the character to explore a new area because you've learned as much yourself from people, places, or items. Whether it's a specific person to meet, landmarks to seek out or side stories to discover, every new part of the country you visit is the result of intentional design and will, in turn, point you down new paths to continue the journey.

Hell is Us is still a way off from release, and Jacques-Belletête isn't ready to estimate when it'll be ready to play; he says it might be several years before the game makes it into our hands. Though, after talking with him, I'm willing to endure the wait to see how this ambitious title comes together. ■





# Previews

spotlight

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# POKÉMON SCARLET & VIOLET

The next evolution appears

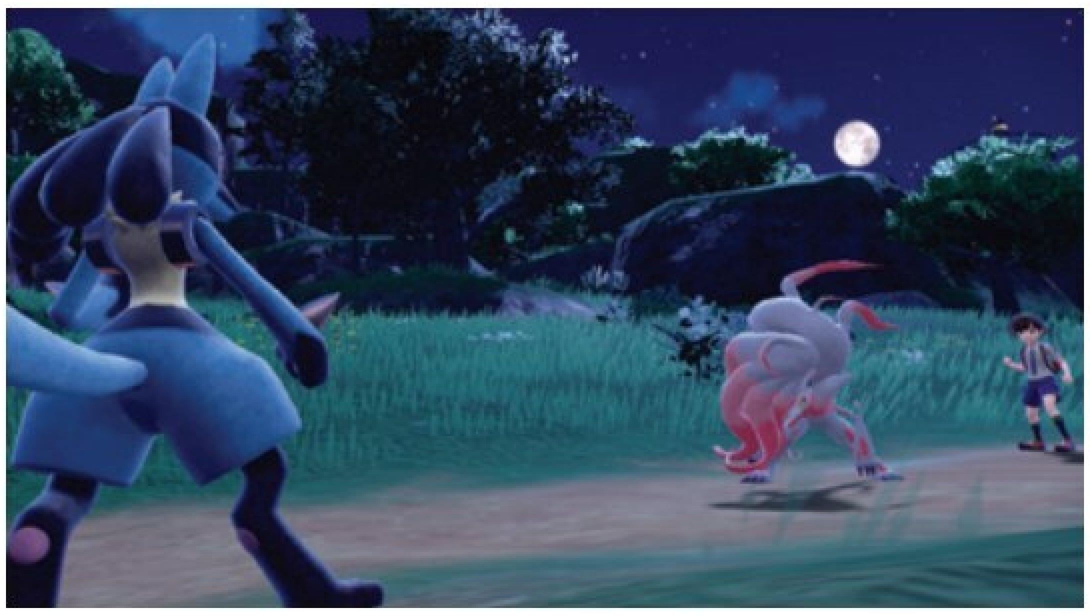
During this year's Pokémon Day celebrations, The Pokémon Company unveiled several updates and announcements for its existing stable of console and mobile games. However, before the stream wrapped up, Game Freak also pulled back the curtain on its next project. Though Pokémon Legends: Arceus just launched in January, the core Pokémon developer has been busy, as it already has the next mainline games, officially revealed as Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet, scheduled to launch later this year.

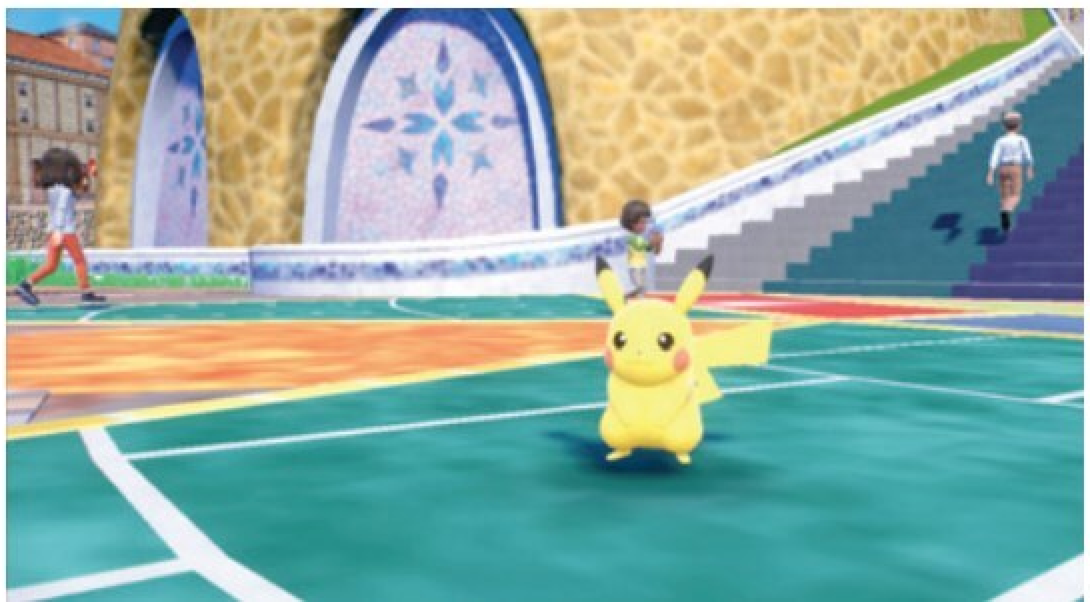
After a cryptic live-action trailer featuring a security guard exploring the Game Freak offices after hours, fans saw sweeping shots of the new games' region, which the developer promises will revolutionize the series. Pokémon Sword and Shield gave Pokémon players their first open-world-style locations through the limited Wild Area and two post-launch expansions, while Pokémon Legends: Arceus allowed them to explore open-world segments. However, those felt like half-steps towards what players were hoping for when the mainline series leaped from dedicated handheld devices to a home console. Now, Pokémon Scarlet and Violet hope to realize the vision many fans had for console-based Pokémon games, as these Gen IX adventures are the series' first fully open-world titles.

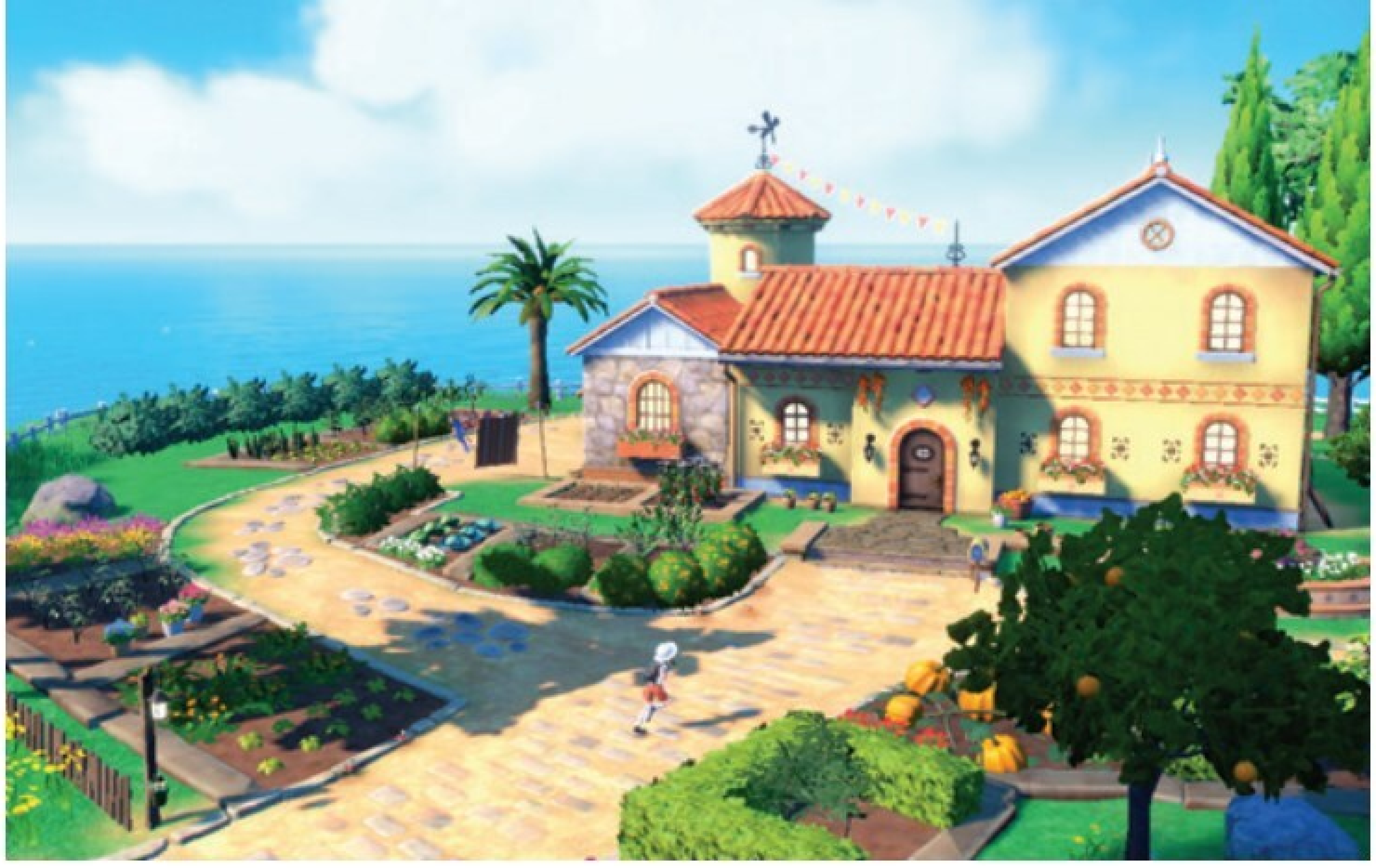
Scarlet and Violet's as-of-yet-unnamed region features borderless towns that seamlessly blend into the wilderness. As you make your way through the region, which looks like it could be inspired by Mediterranean Europe, you spot Pokémon roaming freely across all parts of the world including in the sea, skies, and forests.

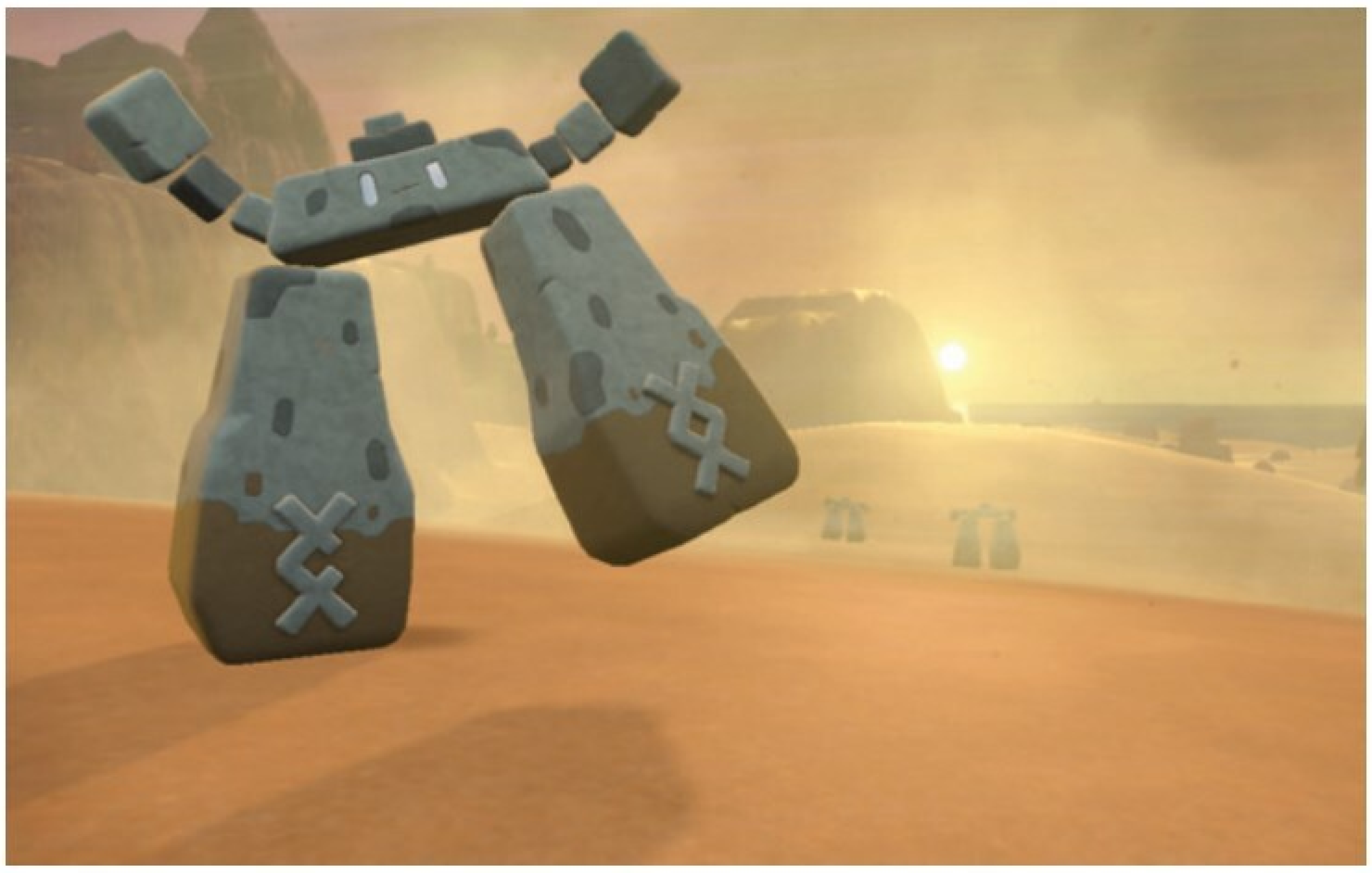
Gameplay footage shows familiar Pokémon in the wild. We caught glimpses of series mainstays like Pikachu, Meowth, Lucario, and Psyduck, as well as other creatures like Starly, Hoppip, Combee, Drifloon, and Larvitar. These Pokémon appear to roam freely through the wilderness and the towns.

While we're always excited to see our favorite Pokémon return, players are hungry to learn about the new monsters joining the massive roster of catchable characters.









Luckily, Game Freak gave us our first look at the three starter Pokémon players choose from: Sprigatito, an attention-seeking grass cat, Fuecoco, a laid-back fire crocodile, and Quaxly, a clean and tidy water duckling. Early social media favor seems to lean towards Sprigatito, but we'll see how that swings once we learn about their evolved forms.

Typically, the two versions of each Pokémon generation differentiate themselves through a few different wild and Legendary Pokémon appearing in the world, but Pokémon Sword and Shield took that to new levels, as the two versions even gave you distinct gym leaders to take on depending on which game you played. Besides unique starting outfits for trainers, we don't know what differences Pokémon Scarlet and Violet will offer. Still, given the big differences between Sword and Shield, we'd be surprised if Game Freak scales back the disparity between the two versions in this new generation.

After launch, players will be able to connect Scarlet and Violet to Pokémon Home, allowing them to import Pokémon from other regions to join the adventure through the new games. That seems to indicate that, once again, players will not be able to catch the entire Pokédex of monsters without linking to other games, but with Gen IX almost certainly pushing the National Pokédex count over 1,000, that's to be expected.

We still have so much to learn about Pokémon Scarlet and Violet, but the early looks spark optimism. Since the mainline series made the leap to Switch, players have been clamoring for a fully open-world mainline Pokémon game. If Game Freak can successfully pull off this ambitious leap forward, it could very well usher in an exciting new era for one of the most beloved franchises in all of entertainment. **BY BRIAN SHEA**

**PLATFORM** Switch **STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing (Online TBA) **PUBLISHER** Nintendo
**DEVELOPER** Game Freak **RELEASE** Late 2022

# THE QUARRY

You're going to Camp Blood, ain't ya?

There are few better slasher settings than a summer camp. It's easy to get a bunch of young people together, with little-to-no supervision or access to the outside world, and then brutally murder them. Case in point: *Friday the 13th*, *Sleepaway Camp*, *The Burning*, and countless others. It's a staple of '80s and '90s American horror.

Which makes it somewhat odd it took Supermassive Games this long to make a summer camp game. The studio's 2015 breakout hit, Until Dawn, fell upon a similar trope: the cabin in the woods (technically a mountain lodge, but the idea remains the same). Eight teenagers gather at a remote location, and then terrible things happen to them. The twist is it's a choice-based video game; your actions directly affect who lives and dies. Seven years later, Supermassive is finally going to summer camp.

In The Quarry, nine teenage camp counselors are left overnight at Hackett Quarry, free from responsibility, supervision, and rules. As you might expect, the counselors' party plans don't go well, as dangerous locals and, per the game's press release, "something far more sinister," hunts them throughout the night.

The sense of helplessness the setting provides attracted Supermassive to summer camp, creative director Will Byles says. The game might not be set in the same decade as the films that influenced it, but the spirit is there.

"It's a very helpless era. It's quite an innocent era," Byles says. "We've definitely tried to keep a part of that whilst we've got very contemporary characters as our protagonists. We want to keep that. We've got this, like, quite anachronistic feel to it, where [we've] got contemporary characters, and it's not set in the '80s, but there's a very '80s feel about stuff."

Supermassive's influences run the gamut of slasher classics. As you might expect, Byles immediately cites the aforementioned *Friday the 13th* and *Sleepaway Camp*. But for the game's dangerous locals, he refers to what he calls "hick flicks" as inspiration, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and surprisingly even *Deliverance*.

Plenty of elements of The Quarry will be familiar to anyone that's played Supermassive's other horror games – like its penchant for using Hollywood talent. Horror icons such as David Arquette (the Scream series), scream queen Lin Shaye (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Insidious*), and Ted Raimi (the Evil Dead series, *Candyman*, *The Grudge*) have roles in the game. So do younger talent like Ariel Winter (*Modern Family*), Justice Smith (*Detective Pikachu*), and Brenda Song (*Dollface*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*), among others, taking on roles of camp counselors.

You control all nine of the counselors. Like Until Dawn and The Dark Pictures Anthology, your choices are paramount; everyone can live or die by the end of the game, and the story adapts on the fly. Following in the footsteps of Dark Pictures specifically, The Quarry also features multiplayer; you'll be able to play the game with up to eight other people, where they vote on decisions. Couch co-op is also an option, where each person picks an individual counselor and controls their actions.

Byles says The Quarry has plenty of camp – which makes sense, given the source material (no pun intended). However, he also says the team did a lot of research into how fear affects the human mind. And when it came to how to torment its cast, Supermassive turned to one of the world's most famous psychologists: Abraham Maslow.

"I mean, fear really comes from the lack of control," he says. "When you're suddenly in a situation that's not of your making, all of your values start to change. We work very much with the idea of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Right at the very top, you've got the 'self-actualization.' We've got all these contemporary teenagers all happily right at the top with their self-actualization, then we just take away bits of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and the characters start to come away. The thing about that is that you're deciding what those characteristics are. So, you're deciding with the choices that you make how they deteriorate."

I didn't like Until Dawn. I found its scares rote and repetitive and its characters stiff and uninteresting. That alone kept me from ever giving Dark Pictures a chance. However, talking to Byles, I'm interested in The Quarry – if only because *Sleepaway Camp* is one of my all-time favorite slashers. That said, it's hard to get too excited; at the time of writing, we've only seen a brief reveal trailer and had a 15-minute conversation with the creative director. Nevertheless, I'll keep an eye on The Quarry, and if it lives up to its promise, I too may be heading to summer camp when it debuts on June 10. **BY BLAKE HESTER**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Adventure (8-Player Online) **PUBLISHER** 2K Games
**DEVELOPER** Supermassive Games **RELEASE** June 10

# VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – SWANSONG

## Bloody tendencies

Big Bad Wolf Studio is no stranger to creating story-focused games with wild twists and ample rewards for players' skills of deduction. The studio created 2018's The Council, which placed you in a secret society with various historical figures to solve a murder. Its latest project tackles cult tabletop RPG Vampire: The Masquerade, and likewise delves into secret societies. However, in this entry, titled Swansong, the elite group is made up of vampires in Boston, who are under attack by mysterious assassins. I recently went hands-on to see how it's shaping up.

Swansong features three different protagonists you'll swap between throughout the game. All have the simple goal of learning the identities of these dangerous attackers, forcing them to investigate various locales, convince people to reveal their secrets, and solve puzzles for clues. You can also customize each protagonist's skills to suit a playstyle, whether it's giving them hacking or persuasion abilities. In addition, every character has a unique vampiric power, such as the ability to conceal their presence. Be aware though, as a vampire, you need to feed after using these powers, and part of the challenge is finding a hiding place to commit the act.

For my demo, I played a story section for Galeb, whose mission is to track down a man who had critical information about the Primogen Council. When Galeb arrives at the man's home, he finds a murder scene. My first act is to investigate the premises thoroughly, searching the body and bedrooms for clues. In Swansong, you must be highly attentive to every detail, as it could be key to getting the most information from the scenario. In one instance, I discover the daughter's birthday, quickly using it as a password to unlock a cellphone.

Depending on the skills you invest in and their strength, information can be uncovered in different ways. For instance, you might be able to easily lockpick a door, or by meticulously searching the house, find a key to open it. You only have so much willpower, and using skills will deplete this, so the challenge lies in spending them wisely. I saved my willpower for intimidation and seduction tactics to persuade others to give me more info.

I played through the demo twice and found different ways to access parts of the house and uncover new clues that resulted in different exchanges with NPCs. This was the most promising part of my journey, but I worry Swansong may repeat The Council's shortcomings.

**BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE**

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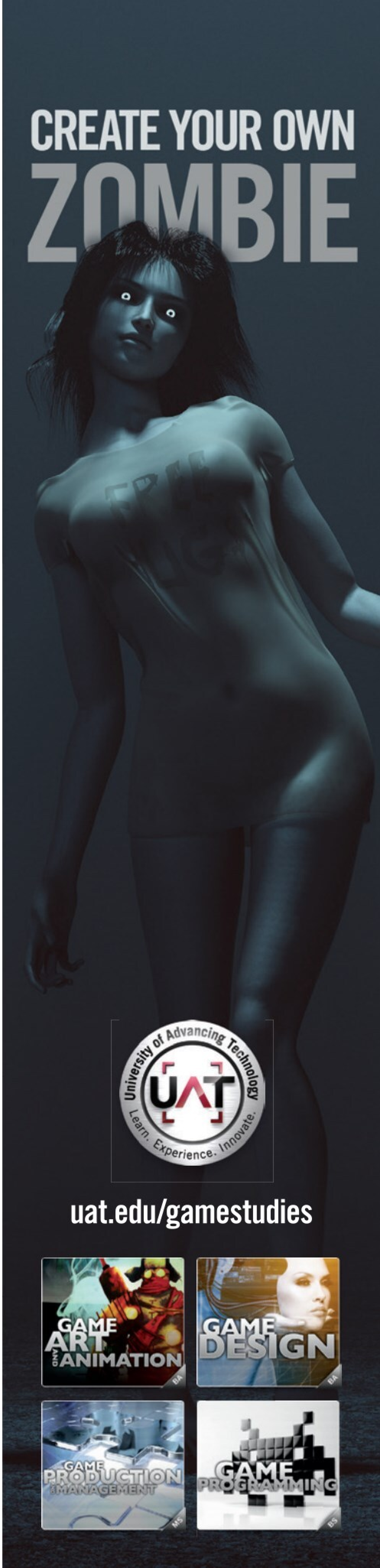
**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Adventure **PUBLISHER** Nacom **DEVELOPER** Big Bad Wolf Studio **RELEASE** May 19



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# GHOSTBUSTERS: SPIRITS UNLEASHED

Asymmetrical ghostbusting hijinks

The Ghostbusters have been many things across several incarnations, but they're foremost a team. Few video games have genuinely homed in on the cooperative aspect of the franchise, but developer IllFonic is taking a stab with its recently announced Ghostbusters: Spirits Unleashed. The multiplayer title lets up to four players band together to battle ghosts and specters, but with one added twist: the apparitions they confront are controlled by another human player.

Like IllFonic's previous titles, Predator: Hunting Grounds and Friday the 13th, Spirits Unleashed is a 4v1 asymmetrical multiplayer game. Narratively, it takes place shortly after the events of *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*. Original 'Buster Winston Zeddemore has revived the Ghostbusters business along with Ray Stantz. Fans will be pleased to know that Ernie Hudson and Dan Aykroyd reprise their respective roles. Players control a new generation of Ghostbusters rearing to make their own name.

The Ghostbusters' mission is to catch the ghost, eliminate rifts (portals acting as spawn points for the ghost player), and calm civilians. Each level has a Global Haunt meter indicating how corrupted the area is with evil spirits. The higher this meter, the darker, slimier, more unpleasant a level becomes, so keeping it down is vital. The ghost player must frighten all bystanders off the premises and cause enough chaos to fill the Global Haunt meter and unleash hell in the form of a full haunting. Levels range from small to expansive; IllFonic described the multi-room museum map we saw as mid-sized.

Ghostbusters use iconic tools like the PKE meter to home in on haunted objects and pinpoint the location of the hidden ghost player. The first-person perspective harkens to games like Phasmophobia, though Spirits Unleashed has an appropriately lighter tone. Once players discover the ghost, they must blast them with their particle throwers. But be careful where you aim those proton streams. Obliterating too many objects raises your property damage bill, which reduces the amount of experience points earned at the end. Cooperation is key, so much so that crossing the streams won't result in the dreaded total protonic reversal. Instead, performing this taboo strengthens protons stream, an ideal tactic for wrangling stubborn apparitions before deploying the trap.

The ghost player has several powerful abilities at their disposal. They can see through walls to locate civilian targets, possess objects to attack opponents or hide in plain sight, and haunt items to emit ecto signals to throw off PKE detection. Ghosts can also slime players to slow or immobilize them and even sacrifice their own rifts to increase their power in a risk-versus-reward proposition. These abilities come at the cost of ectoplasm, but you can replenish this resource by hijacking objects large and small. Ghosts come in various shapes and classes, from Slimer to a toothy-mouth specter or a multi-armed terror.

Spirits Unleashed supports cross-play and voice-chat. It can also be played solo and offline with A.I. teammates/ghosts. Achieving gameplay milestones unlocks new story beats for narrative-minded players. Matchmaking takes place at the firehouse, a fully explorable hub with numerous interactive points of interest. Destinations include Ray's occult bookstore (where players initiate ghost play) and a shooting range for proton pack practice. In a nice touch of immersion, players manually deposit captured spirits into the containment unit after each mission. You can customize the appearance and gear of your Ghostbuster, including their proton packs, traps, and more. Leveling up also unlocks more playable ghost archetypes.

Ghostbusters: Spirits Unleashed looks intriguing, and it's nice that fans less enthused about the 4v1 aspect can still enjoy the adventure alone. We'll find out if this approach makes bustin' feel good when it launches during Q4 2022. **BY MARCUS STEWART**

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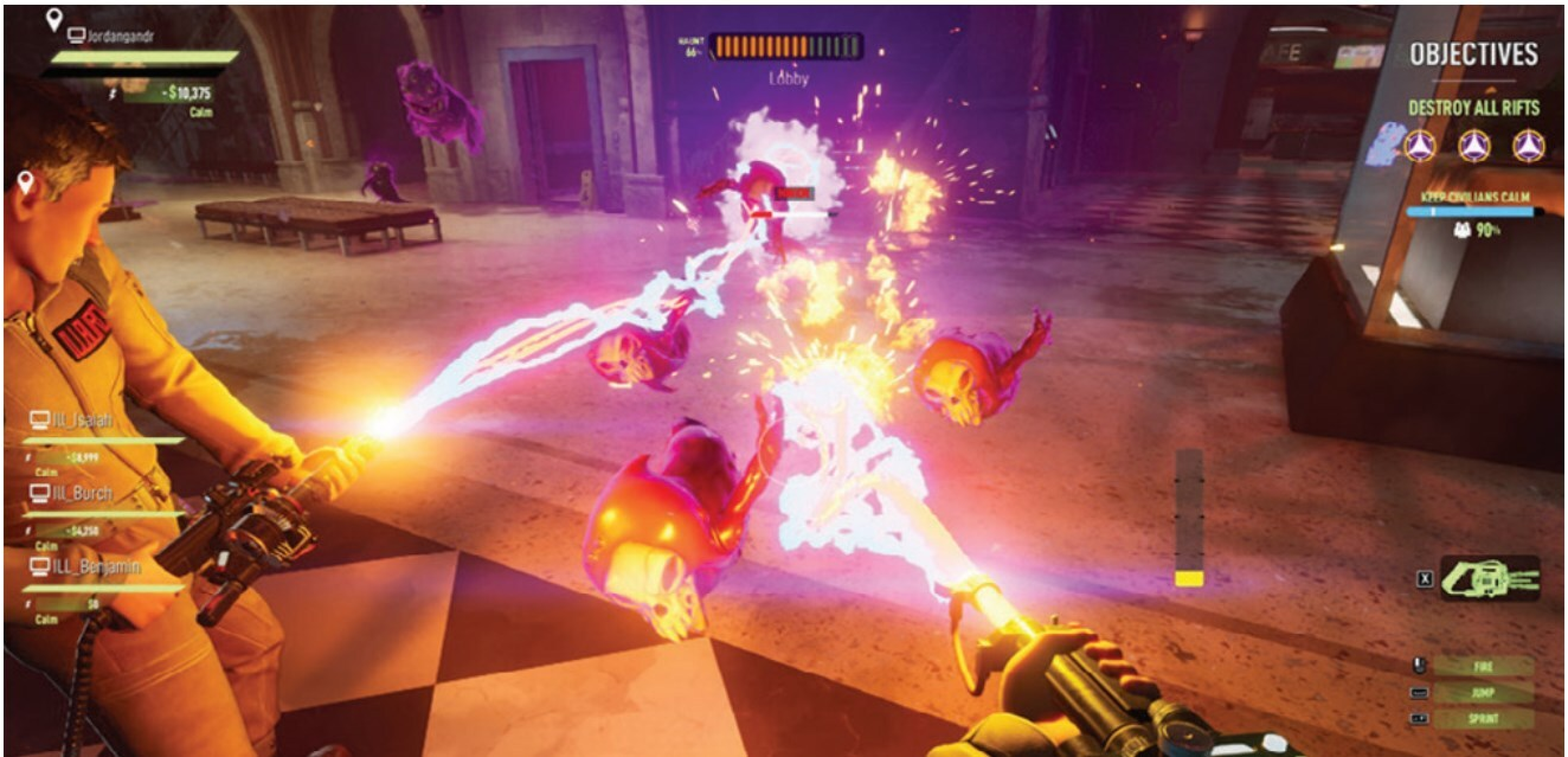
**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 5-Player Online Action **PUBLISHER** IllFonic
**DEVELOPER** IllFonic **RELEASE** 2022



# WARTALES

On the warpath

Right out of the gate, Wartales asked me to choose my destiny, a weighty decision, to say the least. The main continent is home to wild beasts, lowly criminals, and crippling diseases. Would I set out with a small band of bodyguards charged with escorting merchants or, perhaps, a crew of deserters fleeing their abusive captain? Wartales may have small stories littered throughout its prairies and forests – sickly families, salesmen down on their luck, detained immigrants in need of advocacy – but the narrative you weave with your ever-growing troupe of adventurers lies at the heart of the experience. I watched my party members fall to pesky archers and bloodletting bears throughout the opening hours. And when the food supply ran low, I was forced to cannibalize enemies. The gameplay loop is just as oppressive as the open world. Even so, iteration and experimentation lead to mastery.

Wartales' has unforgiving turn-based combat where overeager tactics and poor positioning are quickly punished. For instance, my ranger's daggers would dish out solid damage, but her meager health pool meant I'd have to adopt a pounce-and-run playstyle. On the other hand, my destroyer could tank particularly powerful attacks while taunting opportunistic flankers. This demanding but rewarding ebb and flow is mirrored in the overworld, where I tread over creaky bridges, past goblin hordes, and into dank mines.

In Wartales, customization is vital. Focusing on stats like constitution increases my carrying capacity while completing side missions garners influence I can spend to diffuse dangerous engagements without drawing my sword or buy the loyalty of vagabonds. The recent Harag Marchlands update amplifies this level of freedom, introducing a swampland biome teeming with new monsters and points of interest to discover. More importantly, the skill tree has expanded to include tamed animals. I captured a trio of crocswine – think boars with grass patches for fur – and purchased thick skin specializations/upgraded their HP to make them forces to be reckoned with.

Updates like Harag Marchlands keep Wartales' playthroughs unique. Each foray is riddled with combat and exploration challenges. Juggling the party's overall happiness, medicinal resources, and questlines kept me busy, yet invested in the emergent narratives I created with my unproven squad of farmers-turned-adventurers. Developer Shiro Games states Wartales is estimated to leave Early Access in 12 months (Holiday 2022) and contain "a vast array of new content to the game, ranging from additional regions, more diverse opponents, new battle rules and modes." If difficult turn-based combat in an open-world fantasy setting sounds exciting to you, keep an eye on Wartales this year. **BY JASON GUISAO**

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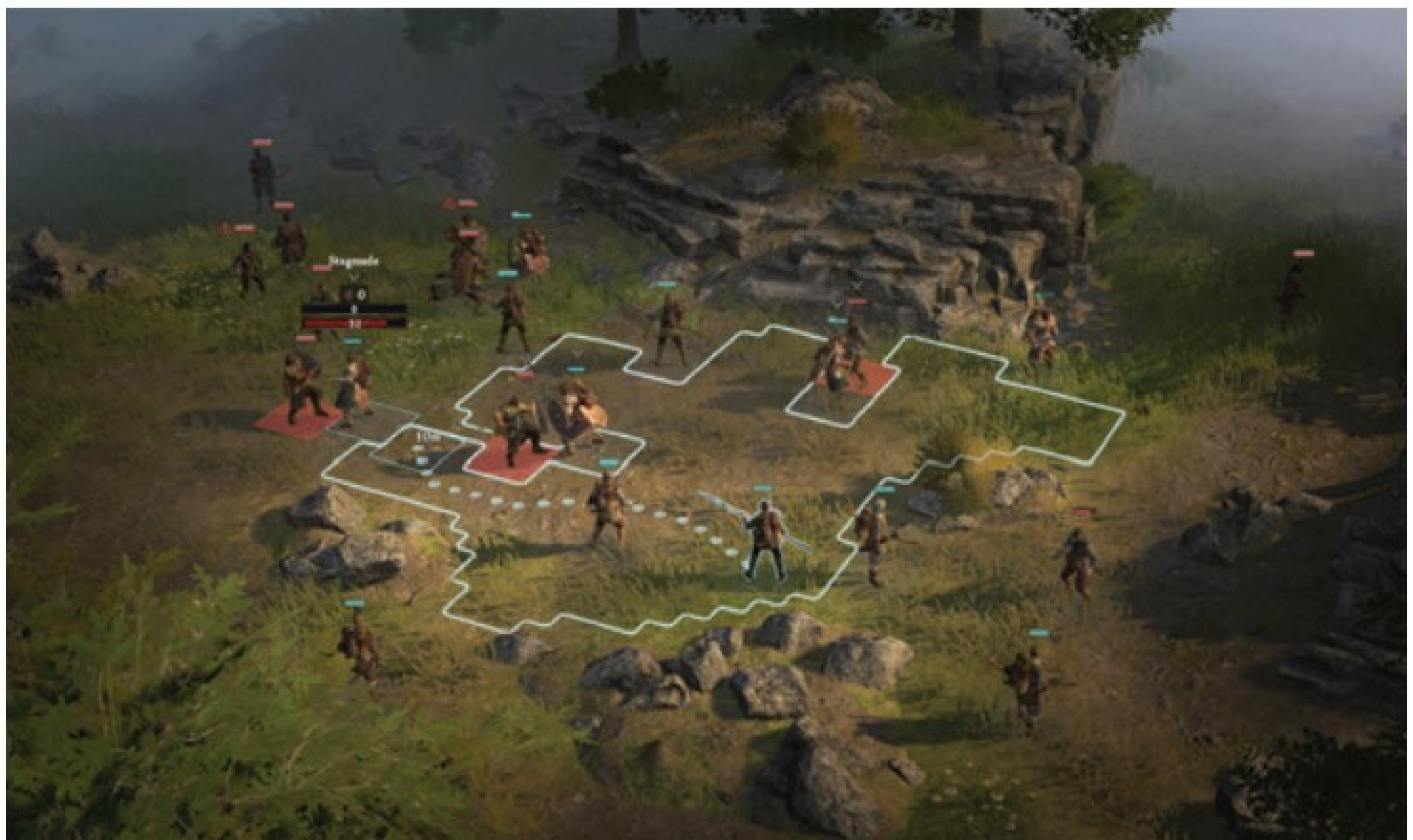
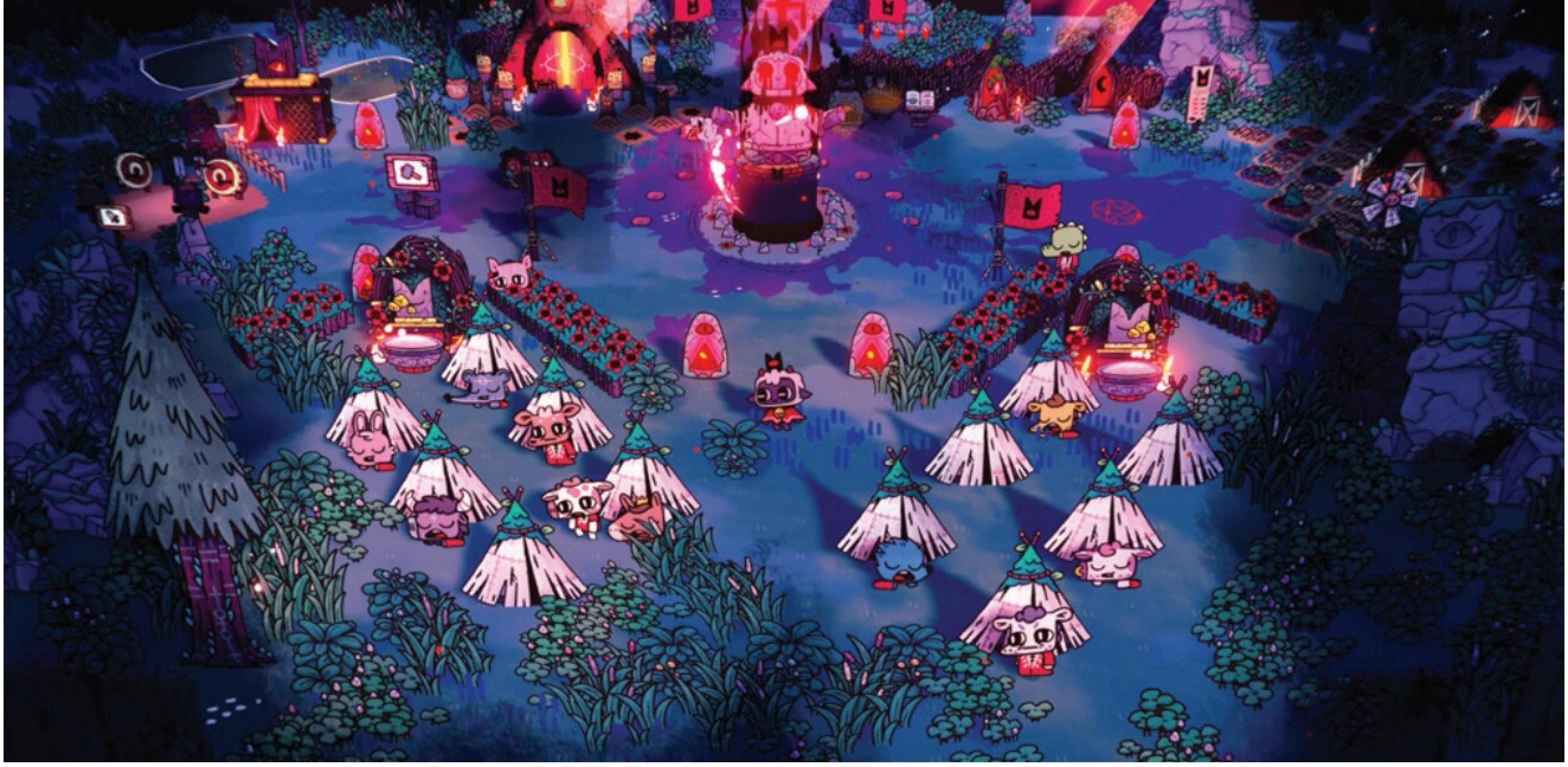
**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing
**PUBLISHER** Shiro Unlimited
**DEVELOPER** Shiro Games **RELEASE** 2022
(Early Access December 1, 2021)





# CULT OF THE LAMB

## Cute and deadly

Despite what the name suggests, I was not prepared for the first 20 minutes of Cult of the Lamb. I began as a terrified sheep. Moments later, I was executed before a demonic panel of demigods and mobs. However, that's where Cult of the Lamb begins because the underworld leader, The One Who Waits, gave me a new lease on life, but only if I returned to the land above to start a cult. And so, like any good cult leader, I searched for followers by making my way through run-based combat rooms.

The action side of Cult of the Lamb plays out like a sword-based Binding of Isaac in that each run is a series of rooms you must advance through to progress. Upon entering, you need to either kill all the enemies, collect resources, acquire a new weapon, or defeat a boss to continue forward. Often, a run concludes with a room featuring a would-be follower you can rescue. If you save them from the clutches of that room's threat, you can indoctrinate them into your cult. Reaching the end of any run rewards a "Heretics Defeated" screen that shows how long you took, how many enemies you defeated, and what resources you collected.

The two runs I played in my hands-on time took me about five minutes each but based on the minimap that reveals the layout of each map, I sense that runs could easily stretch to 20 minutes or longer.

No good (cute) lamb cult leader is successful without a patch of grassy land to call home, and within the first 20 minutes of Cult of the Lamb, you'll discover that it's not just an action game – it's a base builder, too. You need to gather resources – namely trees and stone – to build a cooking station. This action is essential because your flock needs to eat unless you want them to starve and lose faith in you.

Managing your community's hunger is just one facet of Cult of the Lamb. While I didn't go hands-on with features I believe will open in your cult's base after playing more of the game, I got the sense that there's a lot to this base builder. I observed one of my follower's traits and noticed it causes them to lose five faith should I sacrifice someone. I didn't get to sacrifice anyone this time, but it sounds like that will be an important mechanic. On that same note, I can't wait to see how else I can build up my base – it's clear there's plenty of room for more than just a cooking station and the handful of believers that call my cult home.

It all seems highly customizable, too, because even with just the cooking station, I could lightly personalize its look and determine exactly where I wanted it to reside in my base. Each follower I indoctrinated also carried some customization options. I was able to name each of them, decide what cute animal I wanted them to look like, pick a variant of that animal and a color, and select some traits that seemingly affect their performance as workers in my cult.

I was impressed most by the base builder in Cult of the Lamb because of how fleshed out it seems. The combat in the run-based world above is great, but in my short time with the game, it boiled down to pressing one button to slash at enemies with a sword or ax and another button to roll to safety. It feels fantastic, but I'm more excited imagining how I will build the world's best (worst?) cult. I only hope Cult of the Lamb successfully balances the two playstyles when it releases sometime this year. **BY WESLEY LEBLANC**

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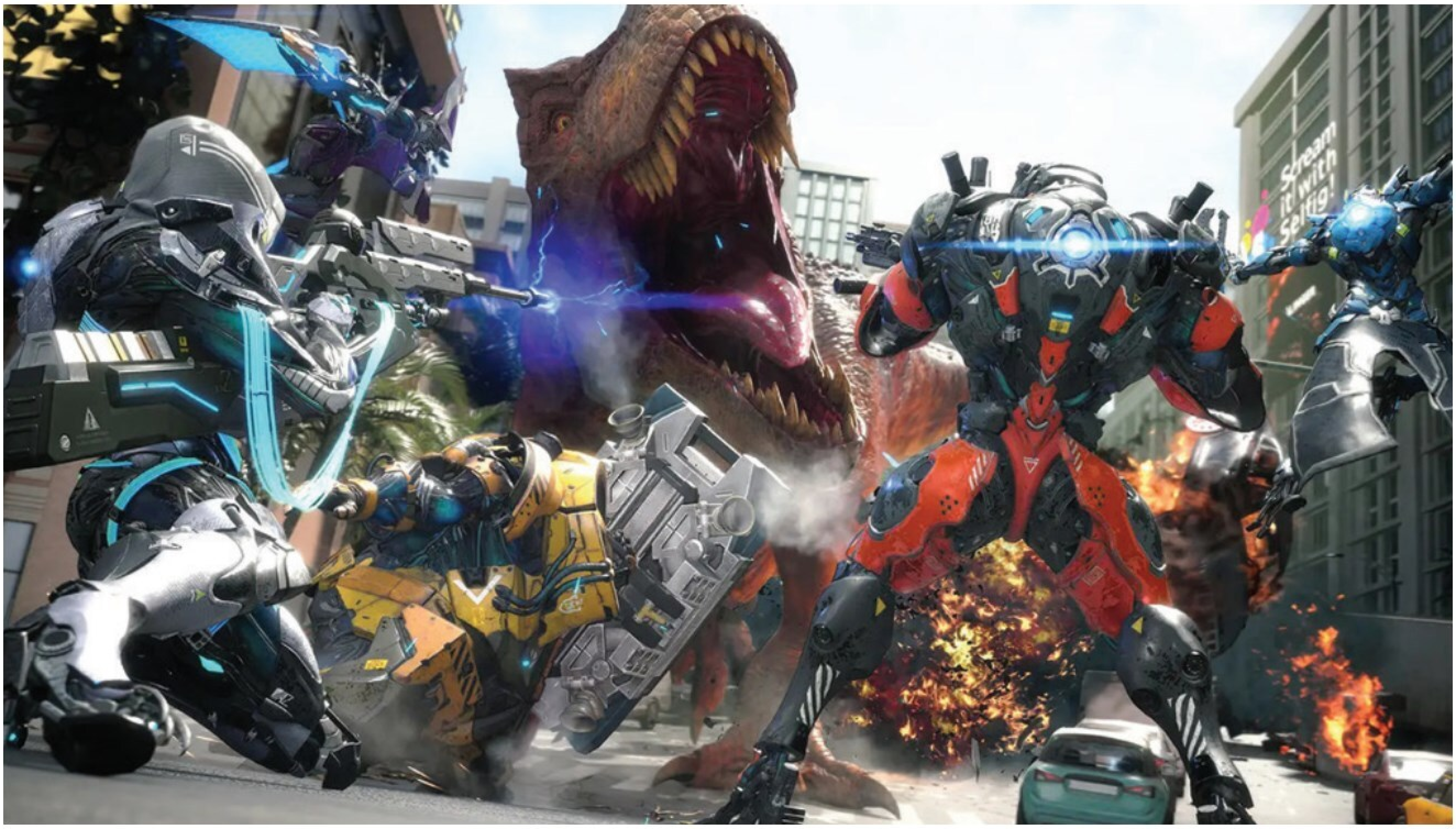
**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Devolver Digital **DEVELOPER** Massive Monster **RELEASE** 2022

# EXOPRIMAL

It's raining dinosaurs


Scream it with Seltig!

The forecasts call for a horde of T-Rex, Pteranodons, and Raptors, and you and your buddies are the only things standing between that hail of scales and the destruction of humankind. That's the wild premise behind Capcom's newest property, which promises to be one of its strangest new projects in some time.

In the near future of 2040, dinosaurs begin to appear out of spinning vortexes and tumble from the sky over the world's cities, dropping in droves onto the urban landscapes and rolling over everything in their path. Fortunately for our beleaguered planet, a corporation called Aibius has an A.I. named Leviathan uniquely positioned to respond to this specific threat – which doesn't seem at all suspicious if you ask me. Leviathan can predict where outbreaks of dinosaur precipitation will next occur, and it has created powered exosuits capable of stemming the tide of dino damage. As one of the exofighters who dons these suits, you cooperate with other exofighters to lay waste to the dinosaurs before they can devastate their arrival point.

Capcom is going over the top with its approach. As dinosaurs rain from the sky, it's not a matter of a few big Jurassic beasts you're holding off. Instead, hundreds of the creatures charge your ranks, and only the combination of different exosuit skills will help stop their inexorable stampede.

While there are many distinct exosuits, each is categorized into one of three roles – assault, tank, and support. Early game presentations show heavyweight Roadblock tanks holding off teeming waves of dinosaurs with a massive shield. At the same time, a Deadeye assault exosuit lurks behind, pouring assault rifle bullets into the stacked-up dino masses, even as a Witchdoctor support exosuit leaps agilely around the battlefield to dish out repairs, buffs, and debuffs. In an interesting twist, players can change exosuits on the fly, even in the middle of a mission, encouraging teams to adapt their strategy as the combat situation on the ground evolves.

The primary game mode, entitled Dino Survival, tasks two teams of five players to take on various PvE and PvP missions, battling to complete objectives in the shortest possible time. The extent of the competitive component remains unrevealed. Still, Capcom has implied that a broader story about the origin of the strange dinosaur vortexes is set to unfold even as the unusual cooperative/competitive hybrid experience plays out.

A lot is going on in Exoprimal, and it's too early to say if the various pieces will fit together pleasingly. But it's hard to fault the amusing absurdity of the core idea or the potential for some fast-paced fun. Like some strange cross-breed of *Sharknado*, Earth Defense Force, and *Jurassic World*, Exoprimal is going big in its lead-up to a launch sometime in 2023. **BY MATT MILLER**

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**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1 to 10-Player Online Action
**PUBLISHER** Capcom **DEVELOPER** Capcom **RELEASE** 2023

# FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

## Extracurricular activities

Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes is another take on the popular strategy franchise from the hands of Omega Force – developer of Fire Emblem Warriors on the Switch and 3DS. The Koei Tecmo-owned studio is best known for its Dynasty Warriors series and giving other series like The Legend of Zelda, Dragon Quest, Gundam, and One Piece massive hack-and-slash facelifts. Three Hopes is its latest translation of the Fire Emblems world.

Warriors took fan-favorite characters and classic heroes like Marth, Tiki, and Lyn from the history of Fire Emblem and let them fight alongside newer faces from Fates and Awakening, such as Chrom, Robin, Corrin, and Lucina. Instead of borrowing from Fire Emblem's decades of stories, Three Hopes looks to focus explicitly on the events and characters of 2017's Fire Emblem: Three Houses.

Three Houses occurs in a military officer's school housed within a monastery known as Garreg Mach Monastary. The officers in training consist of nobles and citizens from three rival and temporarily peaceful nations, which all occupy territories on the shared continent of Fódlan. The player's surrogate character Byleth becomes a professor at the academy, guiding these young minds in the classroom and leading them on the battlefield.

Three Hopes returns players to Fódlan and reunites us with the brilliant students of Garreg Mach. There has been no word yet on when this story takes place, whether it's canonical, or how it may or may not interact with the tales spun in Three Houses. Those who played Three Houses know an event partway through the main campaign fractures the tri-nation armistice, causing indelible rifts in the students' relationships and forcing them to take sides in a war for supremacy. Like the previous Warriors titles in and out of the Fire Emblem series, we know we can expect beloved characters to return in some form, and we've seen a few in the first footage revealed by Nintendo.

The debut trailer for Three Hopes shows prominent students from each of the trifecta of factions taking to the battlefield once more, sometimes even on the same side. Edelgard and Hubert are seen leading the forces of the Black Eagles into battle, while the likes of Dimitri and Claude take arms for the Blue Lions and Golden Deer, respectively. Each resembles their pre-war designs, lending credence to this entry taking place during the tumultuous time skip or a retelling of the events in Three Houses.

Regardless of where this tale lands on the timeline, we're excited to return to the battlefields of Fódlan with our favorite students. Once again, the turn-based strategy rules will be tossed aside in favor of Warrior's action-packed scenarios where hundreds of infantry will undoubtedly fall to the mighty forces of the officers who studied at Garreg Mach. We won't have to wait long for this class reunion, as Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes will be released on Switch on June 24. **BY JOHN CARSON**

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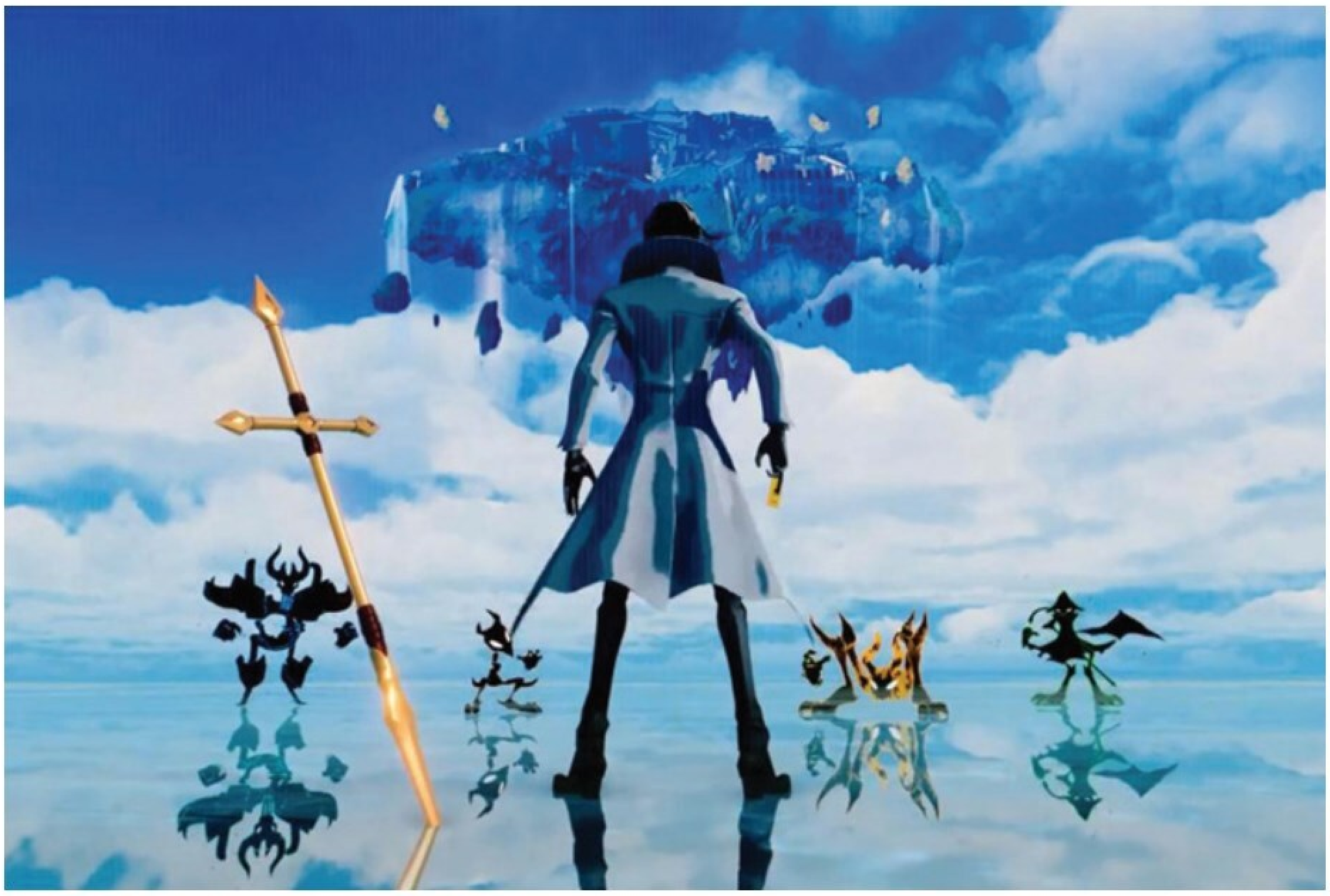
**PLATFORM** Switch **STYLE** 1 or 2-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Nintendo
**DEVELOPER** Omega Force **RELEASE** June 24

# NEON WHITE

Heaven help us



Neon White is the upcoming game from Ben Esposito (Donut County) and the team at Angel Matrix. The Anime-inspired and made-for-freaks-by-freaks – as its creator puts it – first-person shooter is about blasting your way through heaven as fast as possible. And it rules – mostly.

Playing through a recent Steam demo, the most striking aspect of Neon White is is how effortless it feels moving through its various levels. In other games, mastery over systems may take hours of arduous practice and learning; Neon White's base level of gameplay has you flying through stages like a pro. It's immensely satisfying to load into a new area and immediately begin setting personal records within one or two tries.

Each level starts you from square one, with only your knowledge of how to play at your side. As you progress, you pick up cards that serve two purposes: one, they give you access to a gun, such as a pistol, RPG, rifle, etc. Guns allow you to kill the various demons littering a level. More interestingly, however, each also has a discard option necessary for platforming. For example, the pistol may allow you a double jump. The rifle gives you a quick forward dash. As you might expect, the team built levels with these mechanics in mind.

The card system is Neon White's most promising mechanic. Running through a level feels great, but the added challenge and creativity behind knowing when to fire your gun versus discarding creates tense, last-second moments where you barely believe you're pulling off what's on screen. There's a flow-state you enter while playing, where your instincts take over, and you're no longer thinking about individual actions. You're just moving.

According to Esposito, more than 130 levels are coming – most completable in under a minute. I only played a couple of dozen, but I rarely found one run-through enough. I constantly reloaded levels, trying to beat my previous time, and finding new pathways and shortcuts. Esposito sees this as part of the game's design; he wants players to feel like they're beating the level designer, building knowledge, and finding new opportunities. There are, of course, shortcuts the team designed, but Esposito admits players have already discovered paths even he didn't know existed.

Neon White's art style is a clear love letter to anime, mid-aughts Japanese video games, and weird internet art – or, as Esposito calls it, "Deviant-art core." Aesthetically, this is great. There's a classic and slick look to the entire game, from the overly dramatic character designs to the bright white of heavenly levels.

On the other hand, the writing leans further into anime tropes than I tolerate. Despite the creator saying Neon White's "cringe" is intentional, I didn't find it charming – even in an ironic way. When the game's protagonist, "Neon White," said, "Is that … the alt-girl I saw from earlier?" I audibly groaned. The whole script has this perpetually-online feel that's annoying on Twitter and insufferable recreated in-script. Worse yet, there's so much of it. The story is told as a visual novel, and you can build relationships with characters and follow individual storylines. I found it completely interrupted an otherwise great game, grinding an excellent sense of speed (the entire reason I'm playing) to a glacial pace.

But I buried that complaint at the bottom of this preview for a reason: I had an absolute blast playing Neon White, and its story hasn't stopped me from being excited to play more. After only an hour, Neon White has rocketed up my most-anticipated list – and no lousy story can change that. **BY BLAKE HESTER**

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**PLATFORM** Switch • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action
**PUBLISHER** Annapurna Interactive
**DEVELOPER** Angel Matrix **RELEASE** 2022

# STAR TREK: RESURGENCE

A new adventure in familiar territory

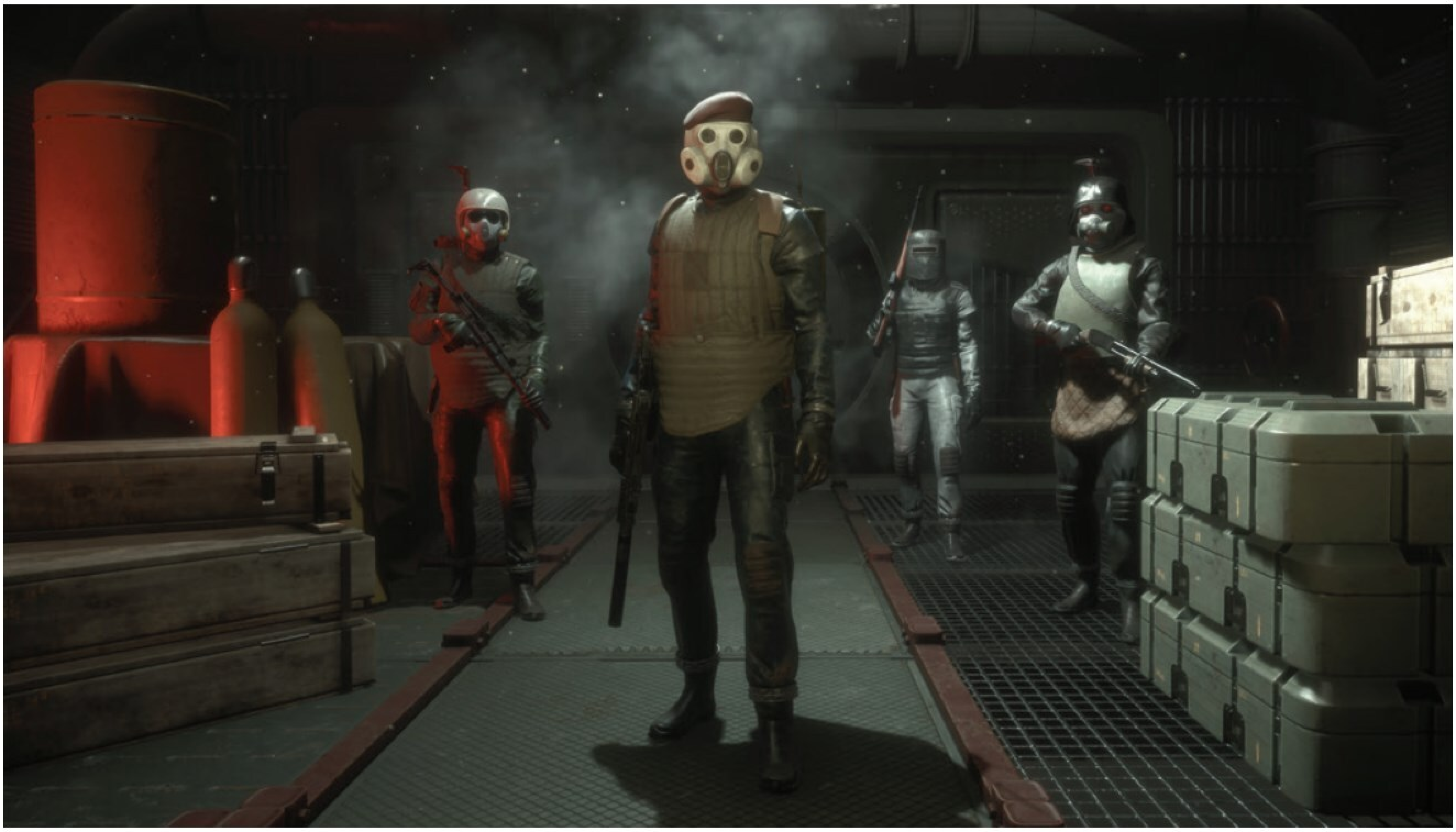
Dramatic Labs is a newly formed studio made up of numerous Telltale Games veterans ready to take a shot at the Star Trek franchise. First announced at The Game Awards 2021, Star Trek: Resurgence is a narrative-heavy experience that asks players to make choices and change the course of the game. If you played any of the original Telltale games like The Walking Dead, you have an idea of what Resurgence's gameplay has to offer. But to get a better sense, I caught up with the game's cinematic director, Kent Mudle, and lead writer, Dan Martin, at GDC to play through a section of the early game.

We start with an introduction to Jara Rydek, just joining the team as First Officer. She and the Captain, a former mentor at Starfleet Academy where the half-Kobliad Rydek graduated at the top of her class, have a quick one-on-one before meeting the rest of the crew. It's here I get my first choice, a seemingly inconsequential reaction to hearing about a recent accident onboard. I decided my Jara Rydek was interested in cutting to the chase and thinking critically about her superiors, especially since the ship's captain seems to be blaming senior staff for not blindly following orders. My slightly confrontational attitude doesn't appear to dramatically change the scene, but settled in this personality, I have some tougher choices ahead as our next mission is explained. It seems simple. We are delivering a diplomat to help with negotiations between two warring parties. But first, the ship needs some repairs before flying into an ionic storm, and I give the order to have the structural integrity field repaired.

Cut to Carter Diaz, the game's second playable character. A talented engineer, he is busy getting things up-and-running as he gets called to go out to work on the shield. The scene is short and gets cut off before I can venture outside the ship, but the developers explained the interesting possibilities of switching back and forth between Rydek, a high-level officer, and Diaz, who skipped the four years of the Academy to enlist right away and see the universe. Sometimes, they said, you give an order as Rydek, and then have to live through the consequences of those orders as Diaz, which certainly adds one more dimension to your decision-making.

The last section of the demo features a familiar face. Back in control of Rydek, I'm introduced to Ambassador Spock, the diplomat we will be escorting to the conflict. The Starfleet legend takes me aside to explain that the situation isn't as straightforward as it originally seemed. One faction supplies the fleet with an important resource, and he asks me to work in a non-official capacity to help resolve the ongoing aggressions before our stores get low. The unflappable half-Vulcan balks at my observation that this detail makes us less-than-impartial in the conflict, but still, that doesn't derail the mission or my future role in it. This ends my adventure in the Star Trek universe, and while I didn't get to experience any life-or-death choices, the team assures me the game will have plenty of them. The cinematic director emphasizes that the game will be bigger than anyone expects and will provide many opportunities for players to influence the narrative. Resurgence also features more beloved characters from the franchise than just Spock, but the developers wouldn't go into details as to who fans might expect to show up. The game is aiming to launch later this year and the team seems confident that it's on track to provide an experience that both fans of adventure games and *Star Trek* will be able to enjoy, but we will have to wait for more information on the game and its release date. **BY JILL GRODT**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Adventure **PUBLISHER** Dramatic Labs **DEVELOPER** Dramatic Labs
**RELEASE** 2022



# MARAUDERS

## The fraught in our stars

With Marauders, Small Impact Games is taking a shot at the PvE/PvP first-person looter shooter hybrid that games like Escape From Tarkov have popularized in the last few years. The twist: Marauders takes that high-risk, high-reward gameplay into outer space, featuring all the perils that come with the hostile and isolated environment.

Set in an alternate 1990s where The Great War never came to an end, humanity has taken to the stars to scavenge and survive. Small Impact opted for a dieselpunk aesthetic, meaning the seemingly high-tech ships and components have a retro-futuristic flavor. You likely won't be battling with laser swords and plasma blasters but rather more down-to-earth firearms.

Players can raid space stations solo or with a squad of up to four players to scour structures for precious weapons, gear, and other loot. XP gains and items hauled to safety during runs are persistent, allowing Marauders to improve their arsenal and loadouts after successful matches. However, they'll have to work tactically as NPC threats and other dangerous players have similar goals in mind. Rival scavengers can end raids early through gunfights or spoil the dive into a station by stealing your space shuttle outright. That ship can also be upgraded and used in dogfights, making theft of the craft so much more devastating.

Marauders has a lot of fun ideas and looks to be a fun new take on the popular shooter variant. I'll be keeping my eyes on it as further information releases in the coming months. **BY JOHN CARSON**

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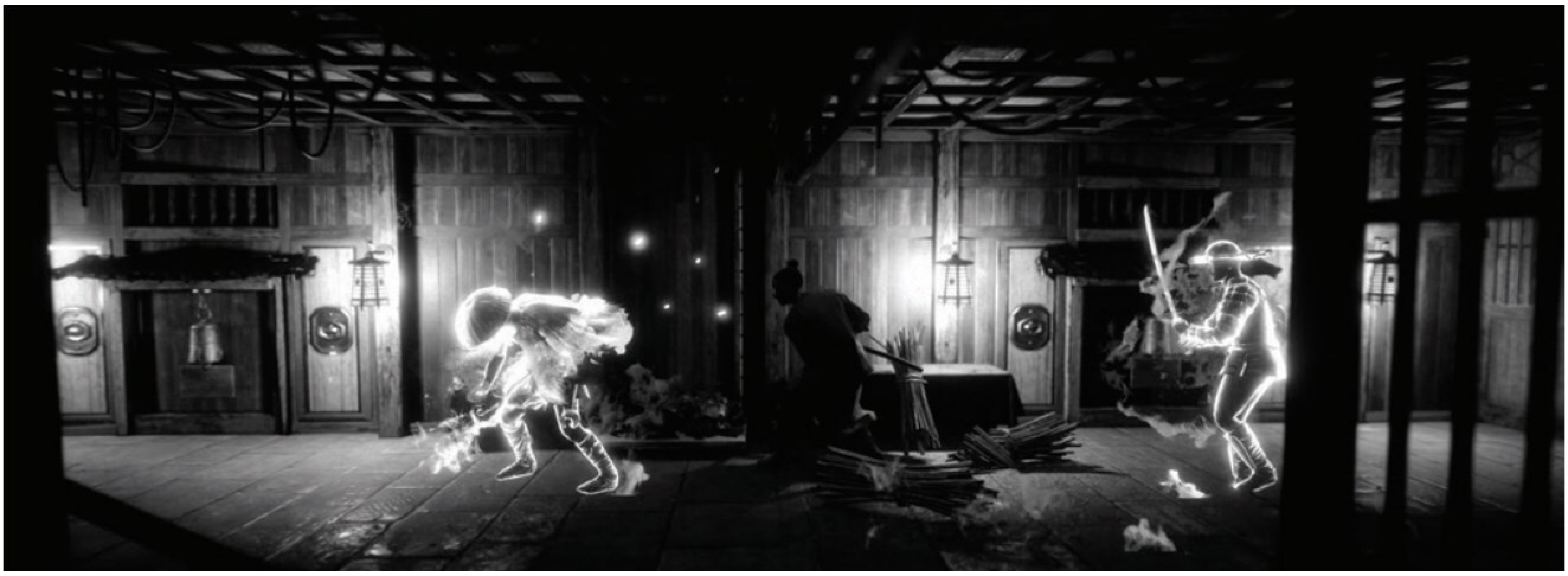
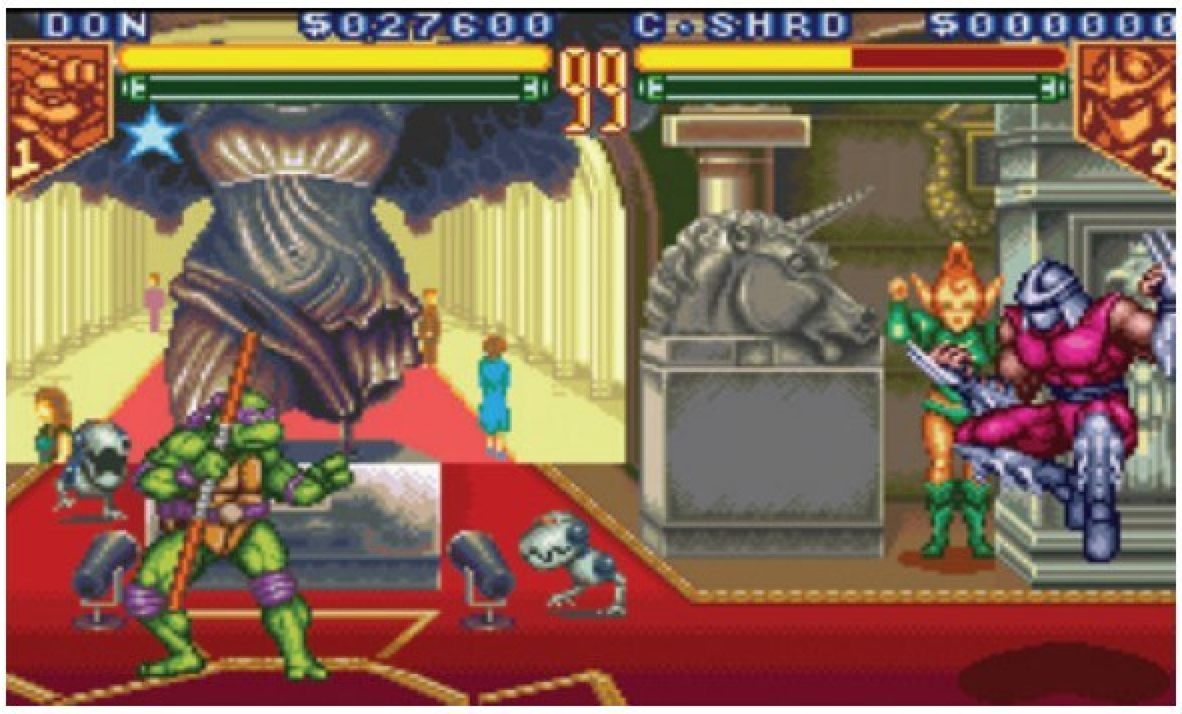
**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** Online Shooter **PUBLISHER** Team17 **DEVELOPER** Small Impact Games **RELEASE** TBA



# TREK TO YOMI

If there's one thing Flying Wild Hog wants you to know about Trek To Yomi, it's that it's authentic. We'll see if that's true when the game launches this spring. Set during Japan's Edo period (1603 to 1867), the studio pulls from classic Japanese films, such as those of Akira Kurosawa, Shinto mythology, and Edo history, to build its 2D action game. **BY BLAKE HESTER**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Devolver Digital **DEVELOPER** Flying Wild Hog **RELEASE** Spring



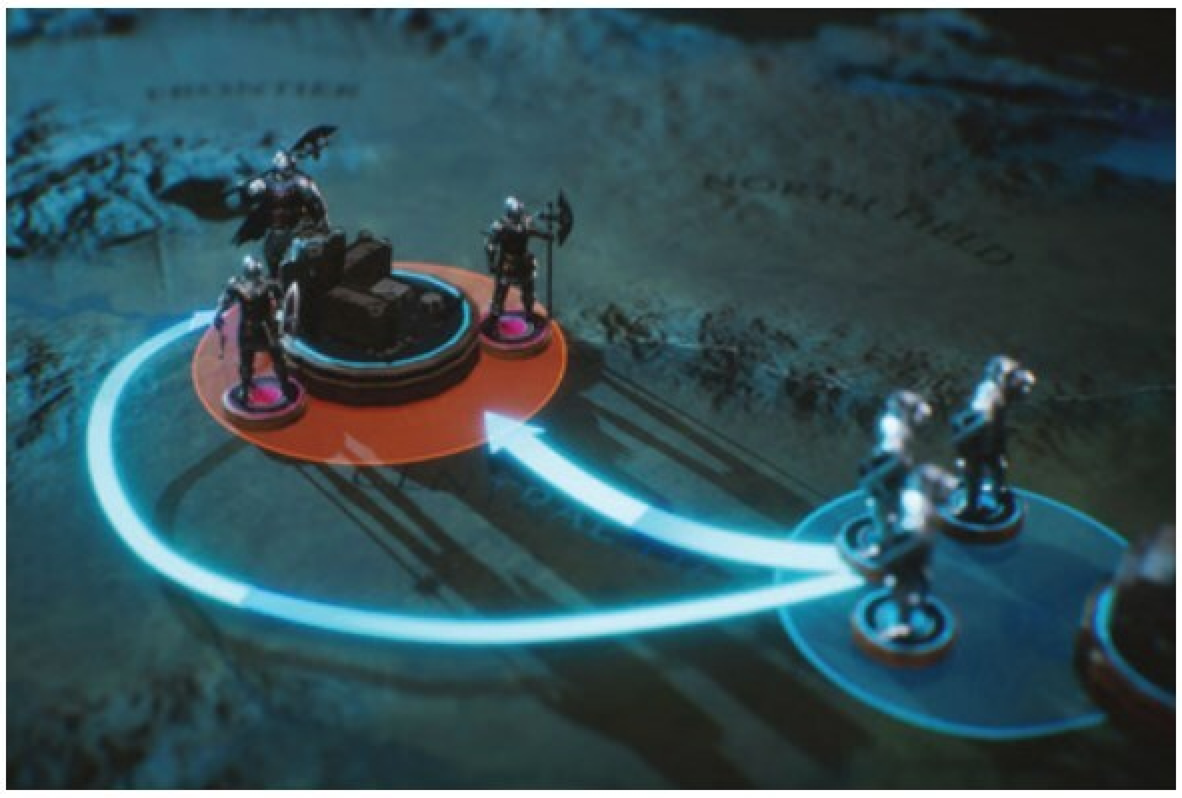
# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection is truly a blast from the past, bringing 13 arcade, NES, SNES, Sega Genesis, and Game Boy games to modern consoles and PC. Not just a simple port, these titles will feature remastered visuals, updated mechanics, online play in some cases, new modes, and much more later this year. **BY WESLEY LEBLANC**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1 to 4-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Konami **DEVELOPER** Digital Eclipse
**RELEASE** 2022

# THE DIOFIELD CHRONICLE

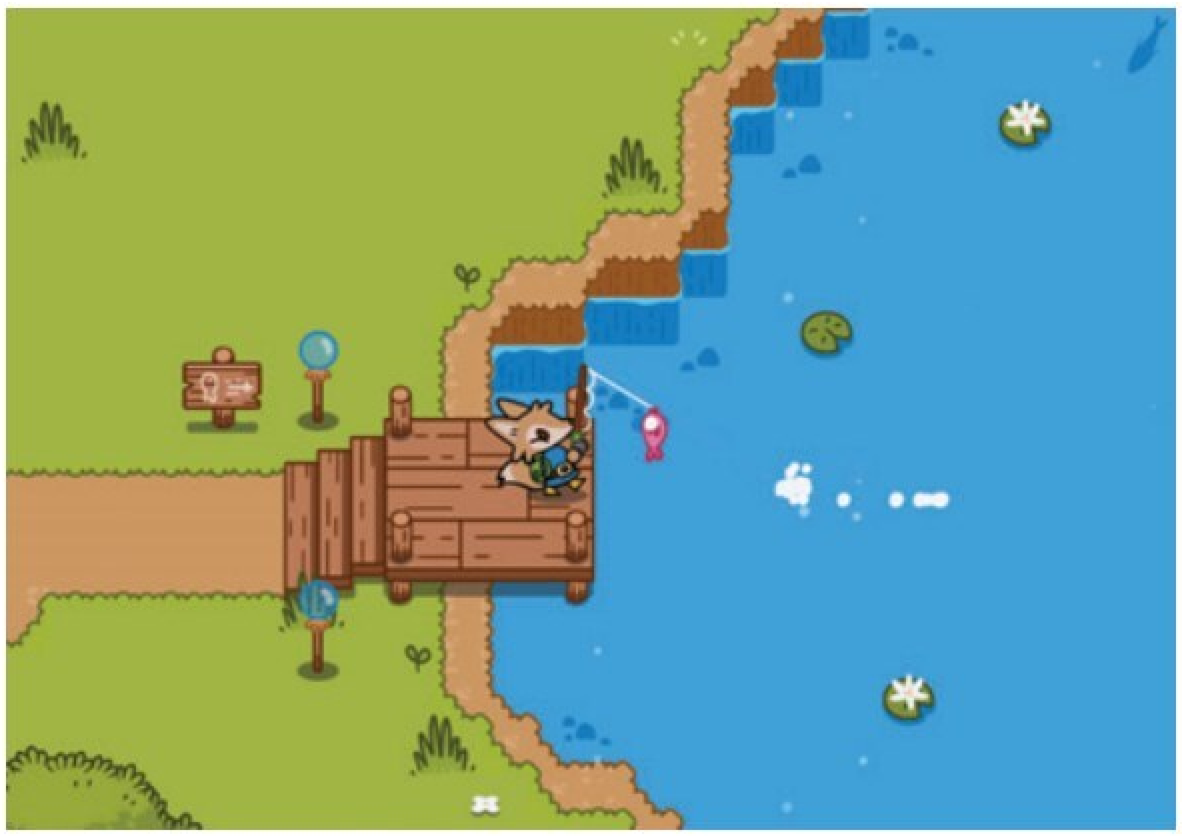
While its visuals look much more modern, The DioField Chronicle looks to scratch the Final Fantasy Tactics itch many have had for decades. A strategy RPG featuring a new combat system dubbed "real-time tactical battle," this game boasts a war of politics and alliances, a stellar soundtrack, and more. It hits modern consoles and PC this year. **BY WESLEY LEBLANC**



**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Strategy/Role-Playing **PUBLISHER** Square Enix
**DEVELOPER** Square Enix, Lancarse Ltd **RELEASE** 2022

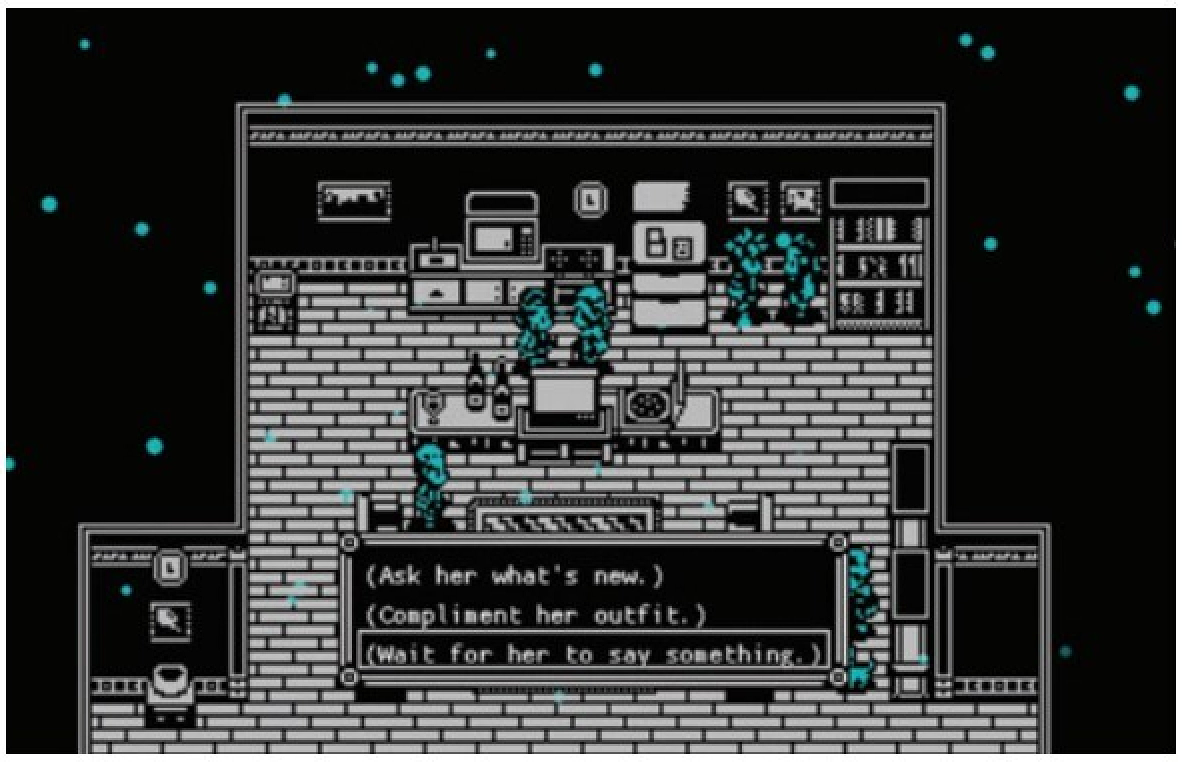
## LONESOME VILLAGE

With a demo currently available on Steam, Lonesome Village stitches together two gameplay experiences. Players ascend a tower, solving each level's unique puzzles to help rescue the citizens of a town mysteriously struck by tragedy. Saved villagers return to rebuild the devastated city, giving players the chance to step into the game's life sim component. **BY JILL GRODT**



**PLATFORM** Xbox Series X/S • Xbox One • Switch • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action/Adventure **PUBLISHER** Ogre Pixel **DEVELOPER** Ogre Pixel **RELEASE** TBA

## SHE DREAMS ELSEWHERE



(Ask her what's new.)
(Compliment her outfit.)
(Wait for her to say something.)

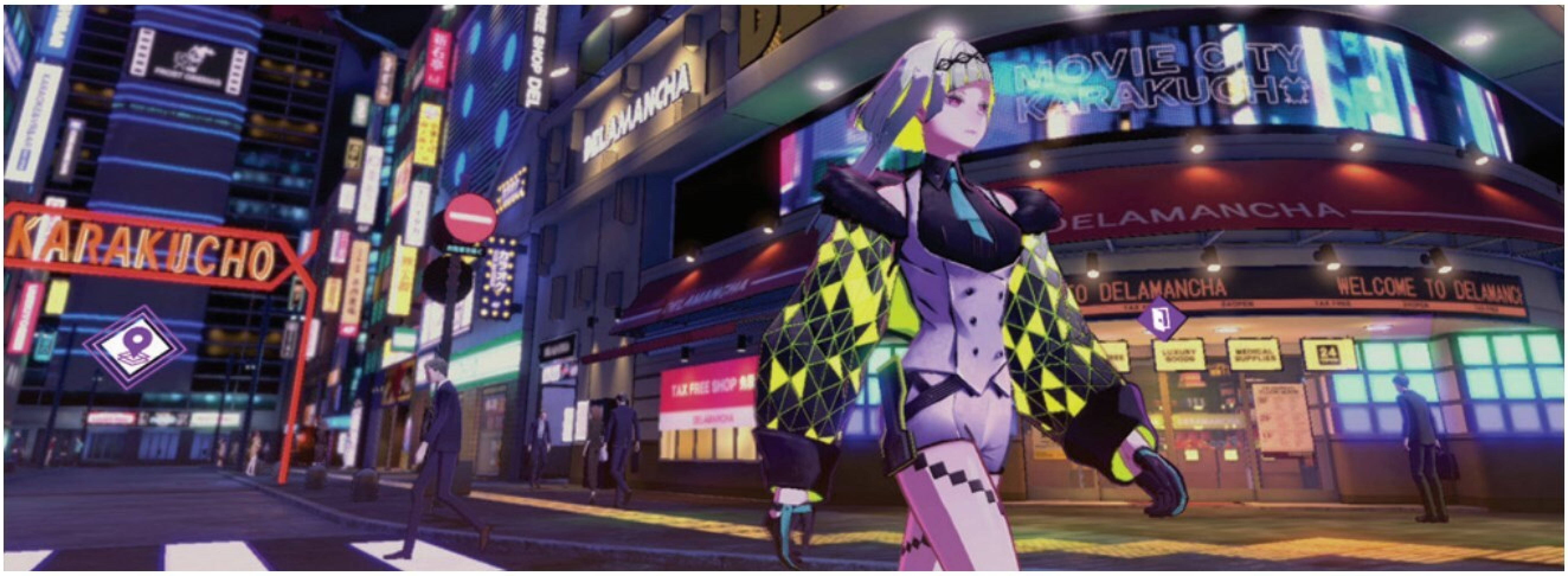
In this RPG adventure, players control a young woman named Thalia who is trapped in a comatose state as you navigate her dreams to help her awaken. While the turn-based battles, top-down exploration, and visual style conjure memories of old Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior games, the nightmarish imagery is surreal, and the focus on mental health and emotional turmoil is intriguing. **BY MATT MILLER**

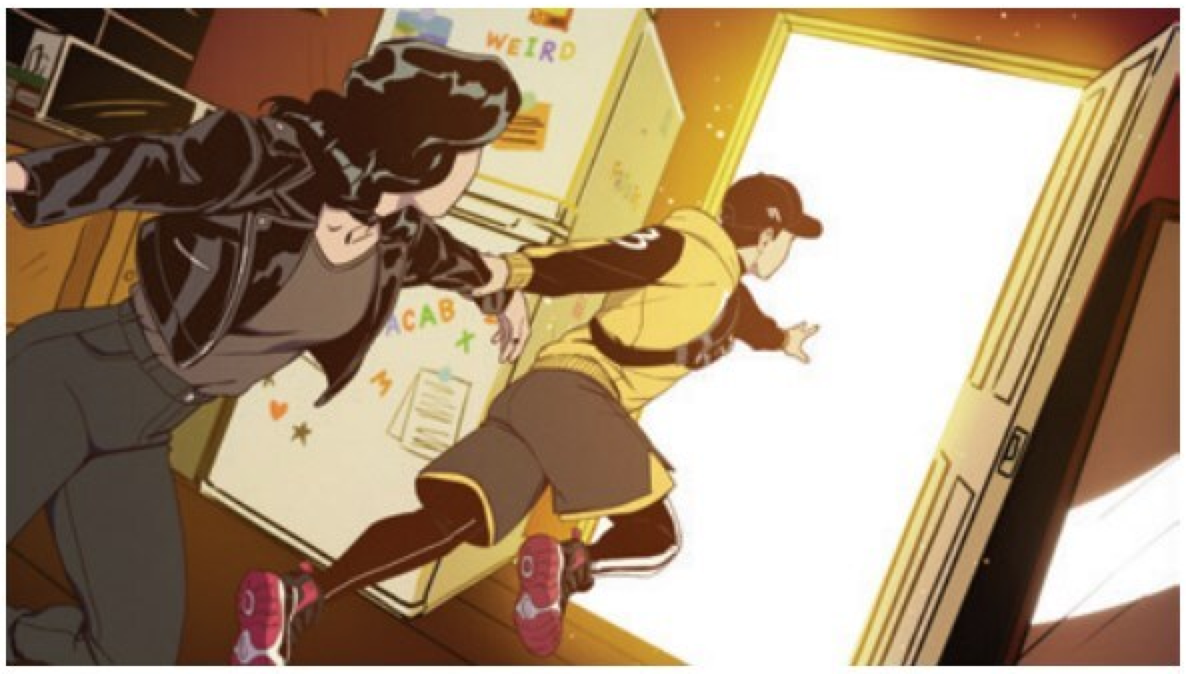
**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing **PUBLISHER** Studio Zevere **DEVELOPER** Studio Zevere **RELEASE** TBA

## SOUL HACKERS 2

Not many games get a shot at a sequel 25 years later, but Soul Hackers is anything but conventional. Atlus is taking another chance on this dark and futuristic concept, with a tale set in the 21st century where a war is brewing between two Devil Summoner factions. You can expect SMT's hallmark Press Turn System in battles, alongside the ability to recruit demons and fuse them to get stronger. **BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing **PUBLISHER** Atlus West **DEVELOPER** Atlus **RELEASE** August 26





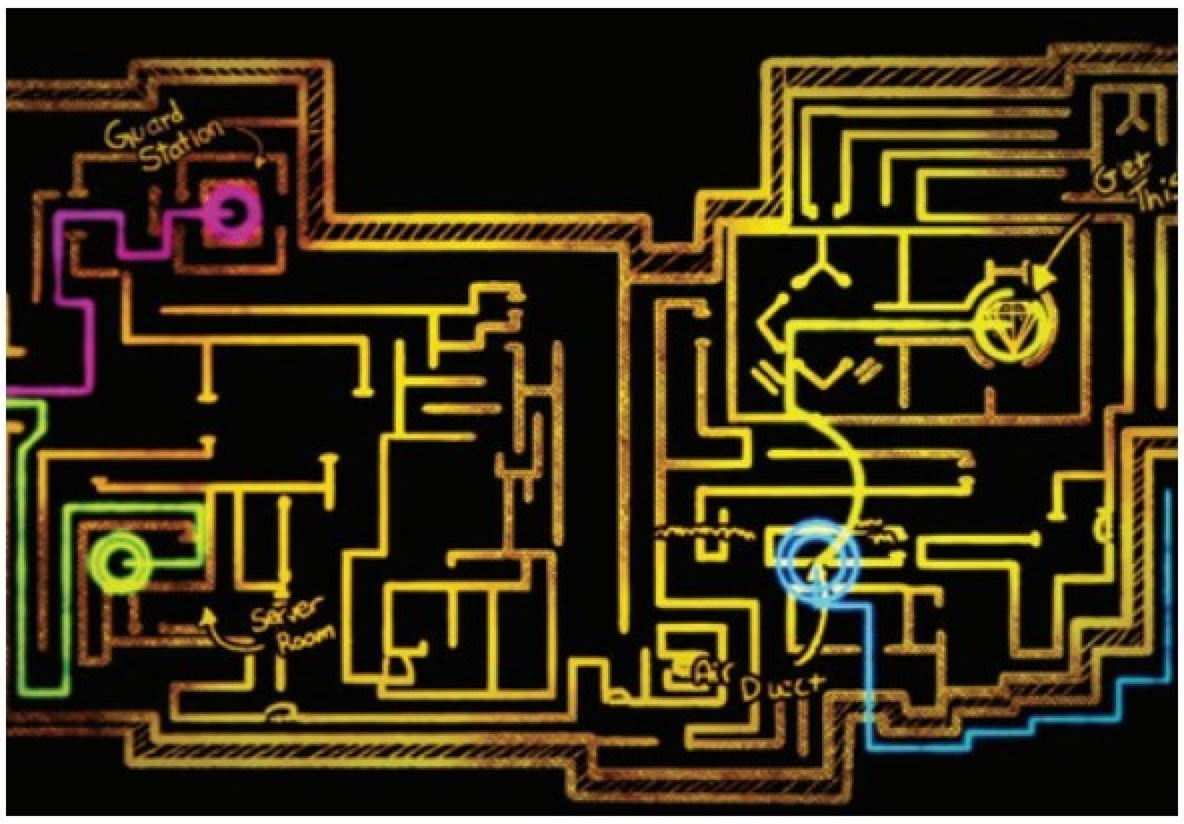
## STRAY GODS: THE ROLEPLAYING MUSICAL

In early development from Dragon Age writer David Gaider's Summerfall Studios, Stray Gods – previously known as Chorus: An Adventure Musical – is a melodic RPG backed by high-note talent. Composer Austin Wintory joins voice actors Troy Baker and Laura Bailey in bringing the game to life. The brief trailer featuring a glowing-eyed singer didn't reveal much, but more information is coming soon. **BY JILL GRODT**

**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing **PUBLISHER** Humble Games
**DEVELOPER** Summerfall Studios **RELEASE** TBA

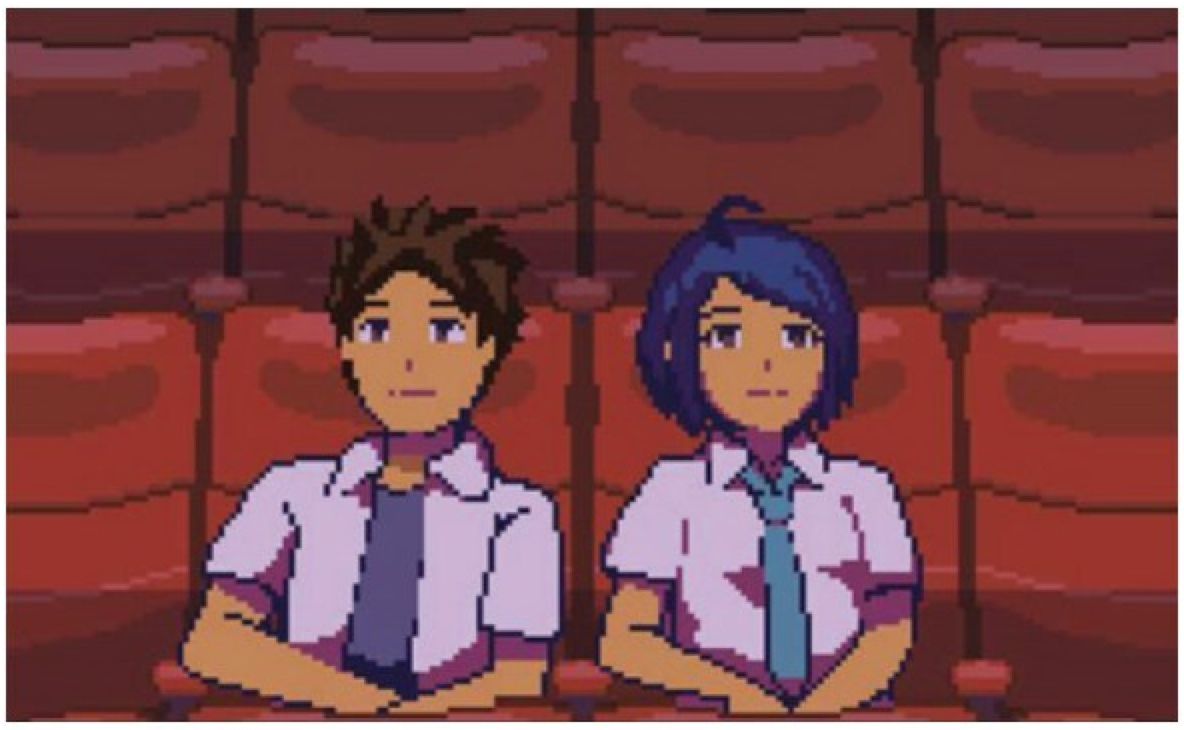
## MONACO 2

Monaco 2 made its debut at Humble Games' inaugural showcase. Working with franchise creator Andy Schatz and the developers at Pocketwatch Games, Humble promises this follow-up brings all the heist hijinks from the original. Player choice is vital, with everything from tunneling underground, rappelling from the ceiling, and hacking computers on the table. **BY JILL GRODT**



**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** 1 to 4-Player Action **PUBLISHER** Humble Games
**DEVELOPER** Pocketwatch Games **RELEASE** TBA

## A SPACE FOR THE UNBOUND

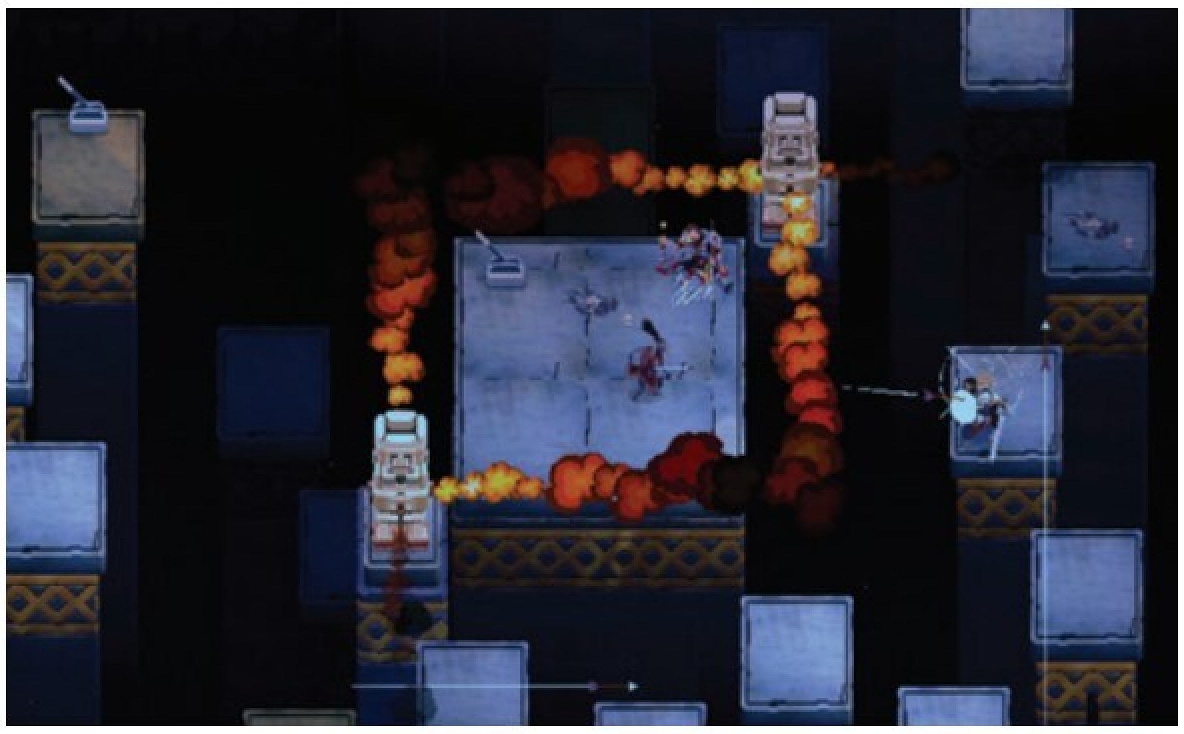


A Space for the Unbound catches the eye with vibrant pixel artwork that recalls Studio Ghibli. But this narrative adventure is about more than just pretty visuals. Set in small-town Indonesia, you must help your girlfriend overcome depression and anxiety to achieve her dreams. You'll solve puzzles, interact with townsfolk, and use a magic book for diving into the characters' subconsciouses, all to guide her. **BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE**

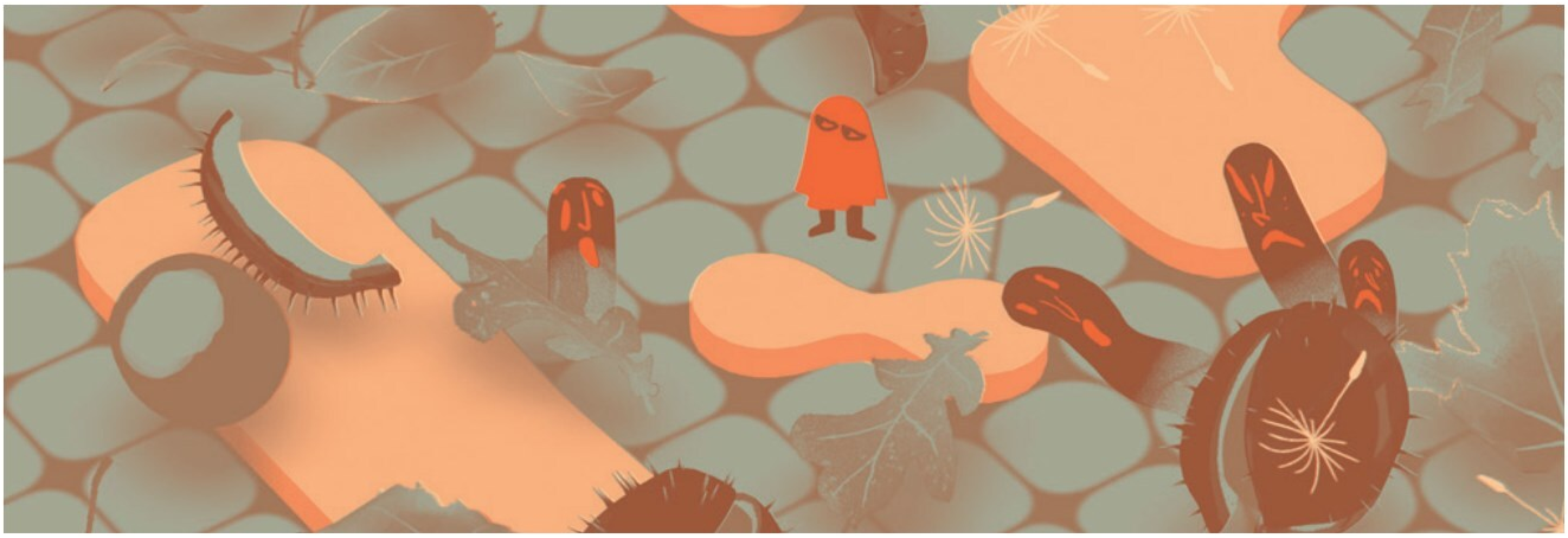
**PLATFORM** PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Role-Playing **PUBLISHER** Mojiken Studios
**DEVELOPER** Toge Productions, PQube **RELEASE** 2022

## NO PLACE FOR BRAVERY

Glitch Factory's GDC demo introduced a new area: the Dwarven Guardian Base. Deadly puzzles fill this underground biome, some requiring players to dash across platforms while dodging arrows and fire. It's a death trap, but recently revealed accessibility features help mitigate frustration. Puzzles aren't the only element that will destroy players, as the story will reportedly rip out hearts. **BY JILL GRODT**



**PLATFORM** Switch • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action
**PUBLISHER** Ysbryd Games **DEVELOPER** Glitch Factory
**RELEASE** Q3 2022

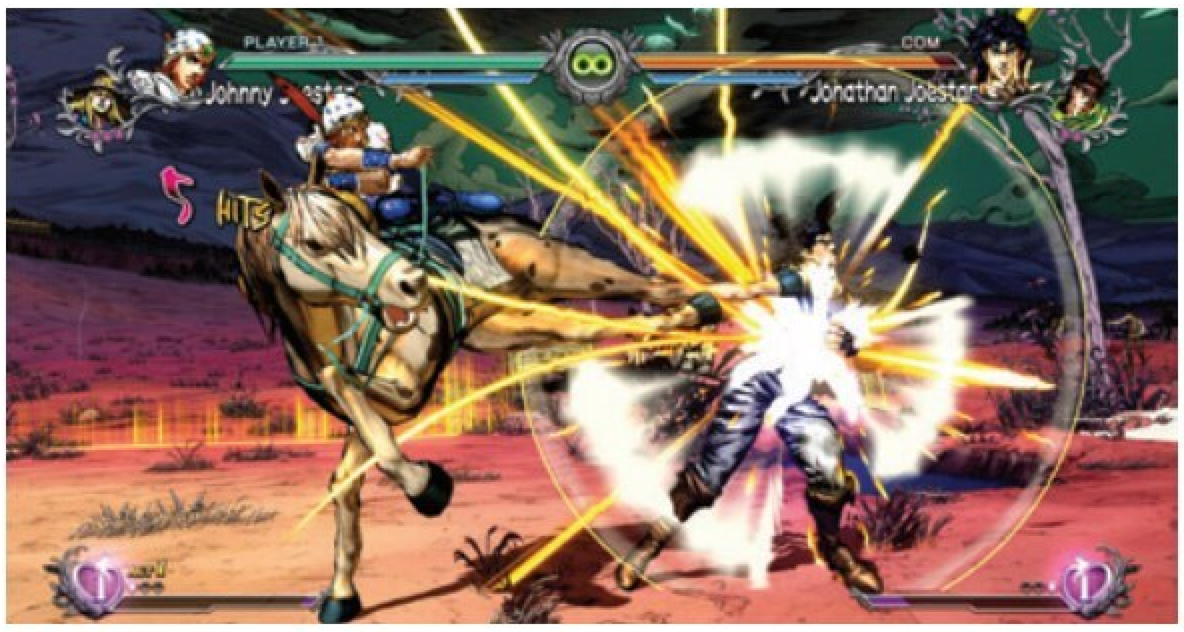


## HOW TO SAY GOODBYE

How to Say Goodbye is a charming yet emotionally heavy title that centers on the familiar grief of losing a loved one. You control a ghost trapped between life and death who must navigate grid-based navigation puzzles to find your friends, avoid obstructing lost spirits, and pass into the afterlife. With a storybook-inspired presentation, How to Say Goodbye paints a coat of whimsy over a complex topic, and I'm curious to see how the puzzle-solving stacks up. **BY MARCUS STEWART**

**PLATFORM** PC **STYLE** 1-Player Puzzle
**PUBLISHER** Arte France **DEVELOPER** Florian Veltman, Baptiste Portefaix **RELEASE** 2022

## JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE: ALL-STAR BATTLE R

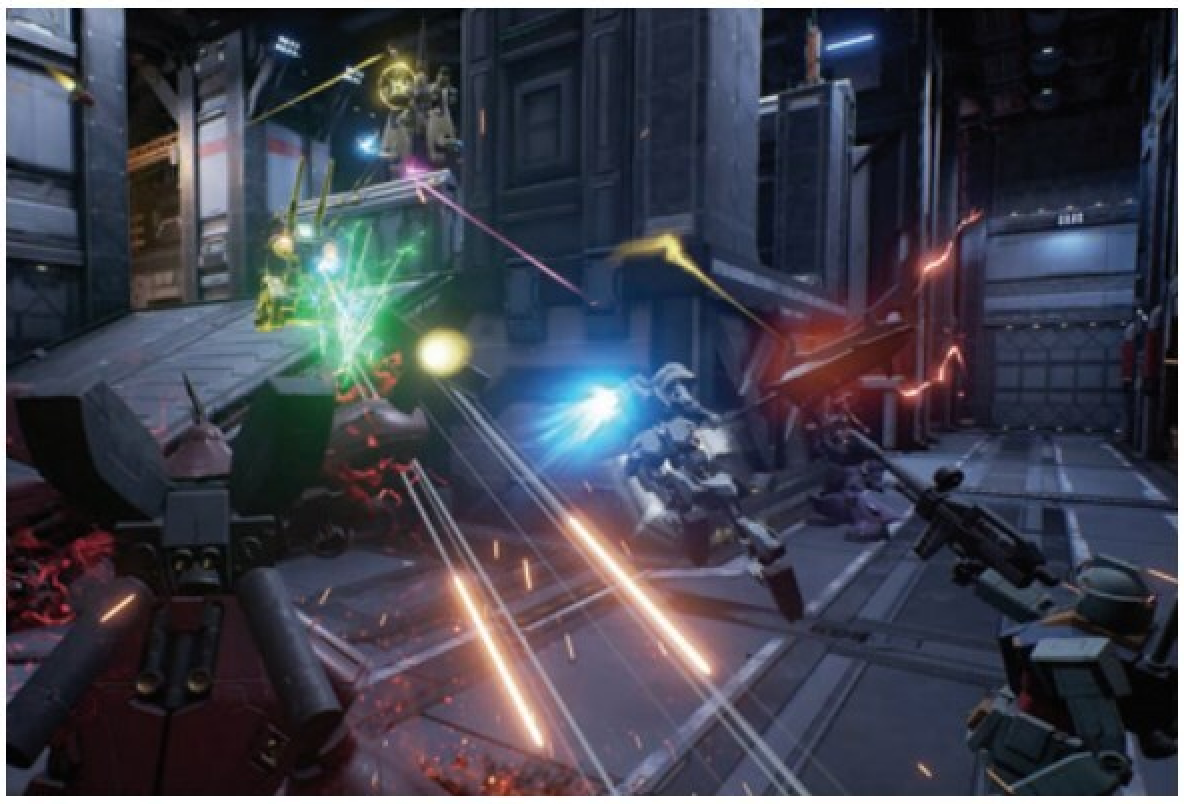


Electric and eccentric as ever, JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R revives the PS3-era 3D fighter for modern consoles with an expanded roster. It features 50 characters impeccably modeled after their counterparts from Hirohiki Araki's popular manga series. As a newer JoJo fan, I'm happy for the chance to play this classic now that Bandai Namco has deemed it worthy of being continued. **BY JOHN CARSON**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Fighting **PUBLISHER** Bandai Namco
**DEVELOPER** CyberConnect2 Co. **RELEASE** Fall 2022

## GUNDAM EVOLUTION

I didn't expect a new Gundam title to take on the mantle of a Hero shooter, but I'm excited to see how this legendary series translates to the genre. Players duke it out in 6v6 team battles in point capture and attack/defend modes in this free-to-play FPS, featuring fan-favorite Mobile Suit Units from over 30 years of Gundam history. **BY JOHN CARSON** ■



**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** Online Shooter **PUBLISHER** Bandai Namco
**DEVELOPER** Bandai Namco **RELEASE** 2022

# Reviews

spotlight

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For more information on our scoring system, visit GameInformer.com/Scoring
To read all of our reviews, visit GameInformer.com/Reviews

GI MUST PLAY

## TUNIC

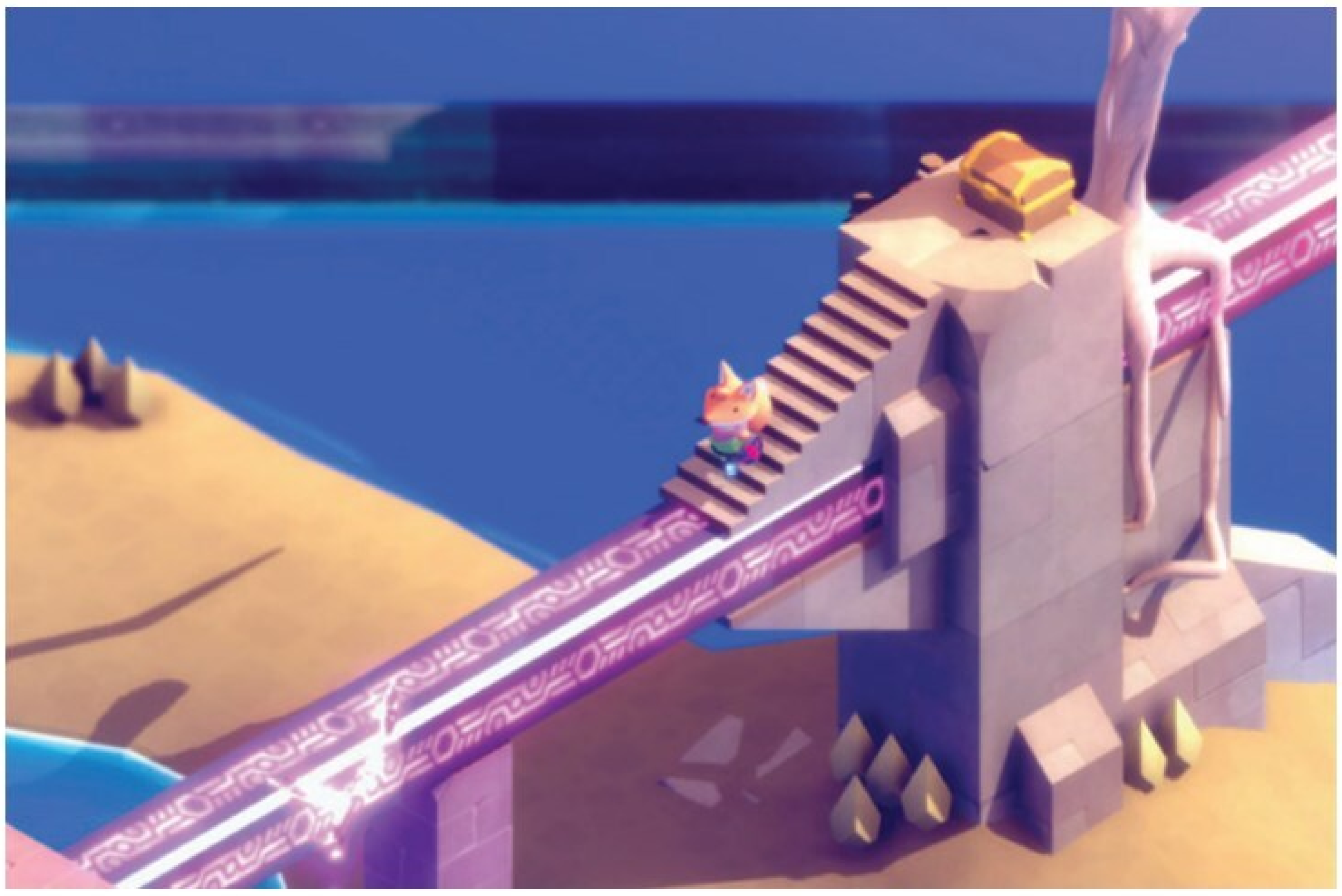
A dyed-in-the-wool treasure

Tunic brilliantly captures the feeling of that special childhood title that made you fall in love with video games. Using a virtual simulation of an old-school guidebook, the game masterfully balances telling players almost nothing with giving them all the information they need. The result is a game brimming with genuine, triumphant discovery.

With its every pixel stuffed with reverence for gaming as a medium, Tunic revels in its historically inspired design. Players steeped in the hobby's traditions will find following their instincts richly rewarding as they quest through its gorgeous world. Impressively, Tunic also melds the charm of the past with the sensibility of modern titles. As an isometric action/adventure, Tunic has a heaping helping of early Zelda games with generous handfuls of the Souls titles thrown in for good measure. It's a winning combination.

The real-time combat had me tackling foes by watching for offensive openings while keeping a careful eye on my stamina. But the distinctly relaxing music introduces an intriguing contrast to the tough battles, and the 'Chill Beats To Fight To' vibes take the sting out of being viciously cut down, as does the world's simple-but-beautiful aesthetic. Dying meant dropping a portion of the hard-earned currency I'd won from my victories. The nice thing about Tunic though, is that you never lose everything. So, you can run directly back to the spot you died to regain the contents of your wallet, or you can spend what you have left on items to give you an edge.

For those turned off by this kind of gameplay, Tunic offers players of all kinds the chance to enjoy its combat system, as the accessibility options include a no-fail mode and the ability to turn off stamina restrictions. The Souls-like combat is intense, but the challenge feels satisfying rather than punishing – though a few later bosses definitely gave me trouble. Each boss has its own feel, with different attack patterns to study, but most play out similarly. An imposing challenger does its best to take you down in a closed-off battlefield; that means no running away from the conflict.



Tunic's fighting is great, but discovery and exploration might be its most impressive elements. The adventure is linear, but its myriad paths contain branches that split off into more branches and then more still. No matter which direction I went, the destination was usually noteworthy, with some paths unexpectedly leading me to new objectives or undiscovered, late-game areas. It made the world feel boundless, which is a commendable feat for a game made up of strictly defined pathways.

Every route is also packed with things to uncover, and there is an unbelievable number of treasure chests. Many of these were seemingly inaccessible until I noticed an inconspicuously hidden passage or used some clever combination of items to get where I needed. Without resorting to busywork puzzles, Tunic constantly made me feel proud of my puzzle-solving skills.

I wasn't left entirely without guidance, however. Tunic's gameplay is inextricably linked to collecting pages of an instruction booklet scattered throughout the world. Despite being predominately filled with unreadable glyphs, the nostalgia-inspiring manual somehow contained all the information I ever needed to know – if I paid attention. One page might demonstrate combat mechanics, while another serves as a map, and still, another could give a veiled look at the game's narrative. But the snatches of largely incomprehensible text didn't tell the whole tale. Despite its lack of transparency, Tunic still paints a compelling narrative picture that gave me a sense of what was happening and left many details up to my interpretation, which I enjoyed.

While I would recommend Tunic to any player, the obscureness that makes it uniquely rewarding can also lead to genuine frustration. However, this was a rare exception to the overall sparkling experience. And my frustration gave way to admiration when I discovered the easy-to-miss solution I needed had been right in the booklet the whole time. The developers' attention to detail poured into those collectible pages is remarkable.

I constantly veered off from the main quest to track something down or look into a newly discovered path, so it took me about 20 hours to roll credits. But there's still a lot for me to do, and I'm excited to go back in to find everything this aesthetically striking world has to offer. Tunic is a stunning achievement that manages to embody the best of nostalgia while being completely refreshing. It's absolutely a must-play gem. **BY JILL GRODT**

**9.75**

**PLATFORM** Xbox Series X/S • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Action/Adventure **PUBLISHER** Finji
**DEVELOPER** Tunic Team **RELEASE** March 16 **RATING** E10+

# TINY TINA'S WONDERLANDS

A spellbinding hit

Tiny Tina's Wonderlands is Gearbox Software's best game. Built upon the studio's successful Borderlands formula, it adds a whimsical element to the familiar looter-shooter thrills and delivers so much firepower to your fingertips you'd think you were wearing the Infinity Gauntlet. Caked in silliness and always trying to make you laugh, Wonderlands hits with distinct charm and handles its characters and world with care, making you engage with both on a journey you never want to end.

From the outset, you learn that series mainstay Tiny Tina has invited a few of her friends to play a tabletop game called Bunkers & Badasses, which is essentially Borderlands' version of Dungeons & Dragons. Tina is the game's Dungeon Master, and you are the party's newest recruit – a hero of your design, right down to the class's proficiency and facial feature detailing.

Playful chemistry is established immediately between Tina and her friends, each bringing humor-filled banter and the sensation they know each other well. Tina is once again brilliantly brought to life by Ashly Burch, who plays well with the careless adventuring qualities of Captain Valentine (Andy Samberg), the strict rules-driven guidance of robot Frette (Wanda Sykes), and the dishonest and vile virtues of the Dragon Lord (Will Arnett). These powerful personalities often entertain and make questing an absolute blast, as you never know how they will react to the situation. The story bounces between Tina and her cohorts sitting at the board game table to discuss the next chapter in the adventure, and your character dreaming it up and traveling into that scenario, a point where control is given to the player. This story flow works incredibly well and is a nice way to bookend chapters and set up the next event at hand.

Tina has the most influence over the quest and can use her god-like powers to alter it at any time. For example, with her imagination leading the way, she can turn an ordinary forest into a magical mushroom kingdom – a stunning visual transformation you witness as you run through the environment. Your party members also influence the world and can propose their character do something to overcome a challenge, such as Valentine romancing a drawbridge to make it open. The situations are often zany, nicely penned, and fun to see through to the end.

The missions draw you in with humor and odd setups but shine in combat and give good reasons to unleash everything you have in your arsenal. Borderlands' overindulgence in weapons is alive and well in Wonderlands and is made better with the addition of spells. The gunplay is highly polished and feels like Borderlands, but packs more of a punch thanks to the fantasy elements, such as a pet wyvern that torches adversaries.

Borderlands' DNA is recognizable throughout most of Wonderlands, except for the overworld, which has more in common with an old Final Fantasy game. You move between areas quickly and within seconds can engage in any activity. The overworld holds many secrets, just as much humor, and does an excellent job of charting progress, so you know what you've accomplished and still need to mop up.

Wonderlands' cooperative play couldn't be any better, offering an experience where everyone has equal footing on the battlefield. A level 5 player will encounter a level 5 enemy, whereas that same foe reads level 20 for a level 20 player – meaning you don't need to grind for XP or power level. Players can also determine how loot is divvied up, allowing for everyone to get their own drops or for it to be shared.

Wonderlands is upbeat and fun from start to finish, offering a rewarding adventure filled with goofy characters, imaginative bosses, and a great sense of ownership over your character through it all. Even with one of Borderlands' most loved characters leading the charge, this experience feels like the start of something new: a rare spinout from an existing series that deserves just as much of the spotlight. As someone who has played plenty of Dungeons & Dragons, I adored how often Wonderlands reminded me of rolling a 20-sided die with friends. It's a love letter to on-the-spot creativity overcoming great odds and friends enjoying each other's company in a make-believe world.

**BY ANDREW REINER**

**9.5**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC **STYLE** 1 to 4-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) (PS5, Xbox Series X/S), 1 or 2-Player Shooter (2-Player Online) (PS4, Xbox One), 1-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) (PC) **PUBLISHER** 2K **DEVELOPER** Gearbox Software **RELEASE** March 25 **RATING** T

# TRIANGLE STRATEGY

Even with my ending, which was one for a much more idealized, compassionate world, I was left a little disheartened. But, maybe, that's the point. And for that, Triangle Strategy isn't like most games you'll play, which is what makes it special, even if it's not always perfect in the delivery of its harsh truths. **BY KIMBERLEY WALLACE**

**8.25**

**PLATFORM** Switch
**STYLE** 1-Player Strategy/Role-Playing
**PUBLISHER** Nintendo **DEVELOPER** Square Enix
**RELEASE** March 4 **RATING** T

# STRANGER OF PARADISE: FINAL FANTASY ORIGIN

Stranger of Paradise is the strangest Final Fantasy game yet, bounding wildly between awful and fantastic. If you can tolerate Jack (and that's a big ask), the excellently crafted combat is worth a look. You may be coming to this game for the story and Final Fantasy experience, but it's all about combat and little else. **BY ANDREW REINER**

**7**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • PC
**STYLE** 1-Player Action (3-Player Online)
**PUBLISHER** Square Enix **DEVELOPER** Koei Tecmo
**RELEASE** March 18 **RATING** M

# DESTINY 2: THE WITCH QUEEN

If it's not the most welcoming moment for players to jump in, that may be a price the developers at Bungie are willing to pay at this point. The long-running story arc that opened in 2014 is gradually steering toward a climax, and it's possible the developers are increasingly interested in building a ride for those who have been in the vehicle for a while now.

**BY MATT MILLER**

**9**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • Xbox Series X/S • PS4 • Xbox One • Stadia • PC **STYLE** Online Multiplayer Shooter **PUBLISHER** Bungie **DEVELOPER** Bungie
**RELEASE** February 22 **RATING** T

# KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND

This isn't quite the pink puff's rendition of Super Mario 64, but it brings the series successfully into the 3D realm and doesn't need to rely solely on its latest entertaining gimmick. Kirby thankfully remains as charming as ever and this new adventure can effortlessly provide hours of glee. **BY JOHN CARSON**

**9**

**PLATFORM** Switch
**STYLE** 1 or 2-Player Platforming
**PUBLISHER** Nintendo **DEVELOPER** HAL Laboratory
**RELEASE** March 25 **RATING** E10+

# GRAN TURISMO 7

Gran Turismo 7 provides some of the best driving mechanics available and gives you several guided ways in which to engage with it. While it sometimes spends too much time off the track, every long cutscene is clearly done with love, and that sentiment shines through even more on the track. **BY BRIAN SHEA**

**8.75**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • PS4 **STYLE** 1 or 2-Player Racing (20-Player Online) **PUBLISHER** Sony Interactive Entertainment **DEVELOPER** Polyphony Digital
**RELEASE** March 4 **RATING** E

# GHOSTWIRE: TOKYO

It's weird and unique, and I think it's great to see this kind of game get this kind of budget, put it all on the table, and use that money to do some baffling and great art. And for that alone, I can't help but love Ghostwire. **BY BLAKE HESTER** ■

**8**

**PLATFORM** PS5 • PC **STYLE** 1-Player Action
**PUBLISHER** Bethesda Softworks
**DEVELOPER** Tango Gameworks
**RELEASE** March 25 **RATING** T

# Tango Gameworks: A Decade Later

Shinji Mikami founded Tango on the idea of giving new game directors a chance. More than 12 years later, we revisit that mission statement **BY BLAKE HESTER**

**IT TOOK MORE THAN 10 YEARS,** but Shinji Mikami says his original vision for Tango Gameworks is finally coming to life.

Mikami established Tango in 2010, after nearly two decades at Capcom directing games like Resident Evil and Resident Evil 4 and a few years contracting for Platinum Games, where he directed Vanquish. His vision: give younger developers a chance to direct their own games and provide opportunities they might not get at other companies. Or, more bluntly, as he told *Polygon* in 2014, let people under 40 direct games.

"If you're over 40, you're somewhat out of touch with the people buying your games," Mikami told the outlet, "and when you're young, you don't know enough about the industry. When you're in your 30s, you have the right balance – you're energetic and have your ego and can focus without distractions, but you have enough experience to manage people and know the business."

Charitably, it actually took seven years for Mikami's vision to become real, marked by the release of The Evil Within 2 in 2017, directed by John Johanas. More cynically, and if you're Mikami himself – now 56 – it took 12 years. Nevertheless, as he sees it, Tango's here now. And its latest game, Ghostwire: Tokyo, is a line in the sand.

Early in Tango's history, Mikami gave many interviews about his vision. But at the time, it was just that: a vision. Somewhat speculative and certainly unproven. However, in the run-up to Ghostwire's release, and with the advantage of 12 years of hindsight, we decided to revisit Tango's mission statement. Talking to three higher-ups within the company – Mikami, producer Masato Kimura, and Ghostwire director Kinji Kimura – we learned how Tango finally got here and what it plans to do next.

### Funding the Dream

As noble as his intentions may have been when founding Tango, Mikami directed the studio's debut project, the survival horror game The Evil Within, released in 2014.

Mikami will be the first to tell you he still likes directing games. But he'll also tell you that in the case of The Evil Within, him sitting in the director's chair had less to do with a personal investment in the project and more to do with business.

"I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say this, but I did need to be the director in order to manage the completely new team under this new studio," he tells *Game Informer* via a translator. "And also, there was this thinking where I probably needed to be the director in order for the funding to come in."

Even though the game was marketed as his return to survival horror, a genre he helped invent and popularize with the first Resident Evil, Mikami spent his post-Capcom, pre-Tango years turning down proposals for new horror titles. Even in the case of The Evil Within, Mikami tells us, "at the time, yeah, if there was a chance not to work on a horror game, then maybe I would've considered that."

"It's not bad," he adds. "It's just; I wish I could've raised the quality a little bit more."

After The Evil Within, John Johanas was the first new director within Tango to get the chance to lead a project – at least that we've heard. How he got it is a bit unorthodox. Johanas joined Tango in August 2010, shortly after the company was founded. Before joining, he was an English teacher for Japan's JET Program, a government program built to teach foreign languages in Japan (and a common way for people to get working visas to move to the country).

Johanas translated a "huge" Japanese novel into English as part of his application process, gifting it to the studio head. Mikami was surprised, but admits he wasn't interested in Johanas being an English teacher. Not to mention, he doesn't read English. Nevertheless, Johanas got the job. "[I] saw there was passion in his eyes," Mikami says.

Johannes spent his first three or four years creating game design documents and then levels for The Evil Within. When Tango had an opportunity to develop DLC, director duty went to Johanas, who led development on "The Consequence" and "The Assignment," both released in 2015. Then he directed an entire game: The Evil Within 2, which was critically well-received if not successful commercially.

Johanas is already working on his next game as director, marking the first developer at the studio publicly announced as director of more than one project. "He's entering his prime," Masato says.

But Johanas is certainly not the most recognizable name from Mikami's stable of new directors. That would be Ikumi Nakamura. But it's complicated. And ropes in Tango's latest director, Kinji Kimura.

## Politics

On paper, Nakamura seems like the ideal director for Mikami's vision. By the time she got to Tango, she'd had a long career in the game industry – also at Capcom and Platinum, though she didn't work directly with Mikami – helping develop the extremely well-liked Ōkami at the former and Bayonetta at the latter. According to Mikami, based on her work as a concept artist on The Evil Within, Nakamura's talent was "above and beyond" other developers. "The next step for her was definitely to be the director," he says.

His instincts were correct – and then some.

At E3 2019, Nakamura announced her directorial debut, Ghostwire: Tokyo, during Bethesda's press conference. Almost instantly, she became an internet celebrity due largely to her endearing speech. It made Nakamura one of the more-recognizable game developers in recent years, and it also put her new project on people's radar.

"Considering the game industry at the time, it was pretty clear that if she were to come on stage as a creative director, she would become very popular at a speed much faster than anyone else," Mikami says.

Again, his instincts were correct, but fate had other plans. In September 2019, Nakamura left Tango Gameworks, two years before it wrapped work on Ghostwire.

Nakamura's departure is complicated and something we spoke to her in-depth about in *Game Informer* issue 338. Alongside the health issues she was experiencing, Nakamura struggled under the pressure of developer-publisher relationships; she didn't like the stress of Bethesda, Tango's parent company, having complete control over her project.

"I was a creative director, so this is literally my baby," Nakamura told us. "My four-year-old baby. So, to let that go – ask any mother to let her baby go. It was that gut-ripping."

As to be expected, the Tango employees we talked to wish Nakamura the best in her career; she's listed in the "Special Thanks" portion of Ghostwire's credits. Shortly before the release of her former project, Nakamura formally announced her new independent studio, Unseen, marking the next stage in her career. "She made the world and art for Ghostwire, and we very much appreciate the work that she's done," Mikami says.

Kinji Kimura, who began on Ghostwire as a game designer, took Nakaura's place. With his new job came a learning curve. Kinji is quick to point to Mikami as a mentor, especially when it comes to how to direct a video game. That's not to say Mikami isn't also taking lessons from his younger staff.

### Getting Bored, Powerfully

If there's one thing that comes up repeatedly in our interviews with Tango, it's the idea of the customer experience. And almost every time it's brought up by Masato and Kinji, they immediately point back to Mikami.

"His mentality goes far deeper in regards to customer experience than everybody else probably thinks," Kinji says. "That has been a very big learning experience for me."

According to Masato, in his current role within Tango as executive producer, Mikami pulls back on projects. He stays in the background; he's a few steps behind, watching over things.

However, Mikami has a lot of experience directing video games – a few of them considered the best, or at least most influential, of all time. Even if he isn't currently in the director's chair, that experience isn't going to waste; it's passed down to a newer generation.

On Ghostwire, Kinji says Mikami was instrumental in teaching him how to focus on the customer experience, be "adamant" about achieving quality, and deal with the stresses of being a director. He also learned when to throw out ideas.

"I've learned about the responsibilities of what we need to focus on," Kinji says. "Sometimes that's a very difficult decision to make, but it's all in [service] of trying to hone down on the customer experience."

Mikami says he chose Kinji to take over Ghostwire due to his ability to process and understand complex information. He was passionate about making a good game, too, which helps. Lastly, Mikami says he has a strong and healthy mental mindset, which is something he looks for in directors.

Now that he's had a chance to see two of his directors successfully ship games, Mikami says he's also learned from the younger members of his staff. The easy answer is learning how to work more efficiently from home, a symptom of the ever-present COVID-19 pandemic. But also a surprising answer: Mikami says he's learning how to be more selfish.

"It's probably more of a reminder," he says. "But as I get to this age, it gets harder and harder to be selfish about what I want to make."

Which begs the question: does Mikami see himself directing another game? Yes. He's said as much in other interviews, recently telling *VG247* that he wants to make "at least" one more game. He tells us, though, it will probably be more than one.

"I think it would be plural," Mikami says. "I'm not thinking about when to actually stop, or making the last [game]. I probably would not be able to just stop."

"I've been working with Mikami-san for a very long time," Masato follows up. "I can tell you that he is probably going to be making something for the rest of his life."

When Mikami returns as director, time will tell. Masato told *VG247* in the same interview mentioned above that Mikami will not lead Tango's next game. That might be Johanas' new project, which Mikami recently told *Weekly Famitsu* (via *Video Games Chronicle*) is "the complete opposite of horror."

Either way, 12 years after first establishing his vision, Mikami's track record stands solid; two out of three isn't a bad number. But Masato also sees this approach to game development as a unique advantage. Tango is doing things differently. And according to him, it all starts with Mikami, a man, he says, that gets bored easily.

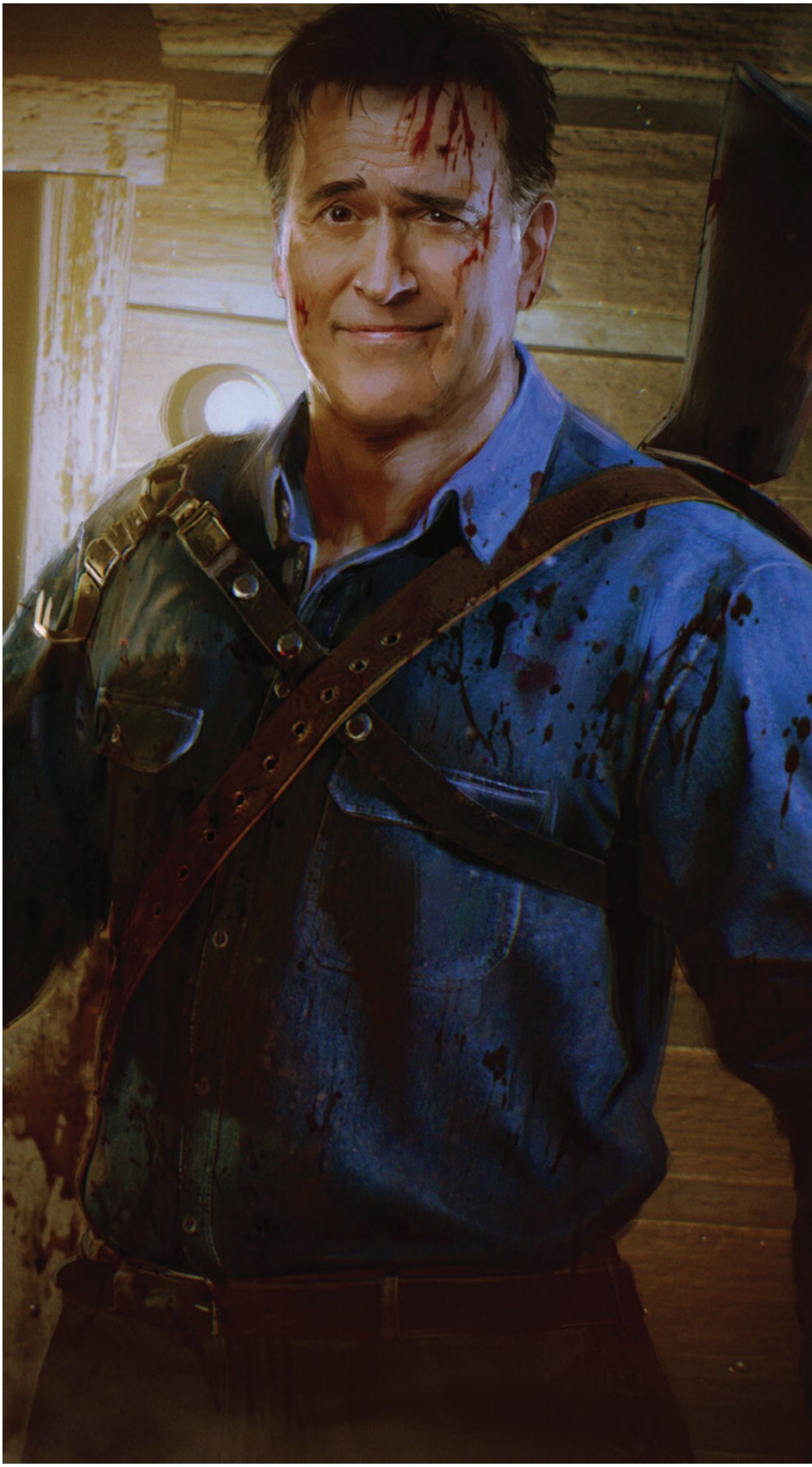
"But in a very powerful way," Masato says. "He wants to do something new all the time. He's looking for something cool and new. It always starts with the idea; it always starts with the game plan, the plan for the game. If he has a good plan for a game, then he chooses a director for that plan. It's always about the game and the game design. That comes first. That's why you'll see us being a little bit different from other studios. We do see that as an advantage." ■

**ONE LAST THING**

# WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?

**"I GOT PRETTY GOOD AT ASTEROID** back in the day. Sam got good at Berzerk. Sam Raimi's claim to fame is that he beat Brian DePalma, the fancy director [*Scarface, Mission: Impossible*]. He beat him at an arcade in New York in the early '80s. While DePalma was working on *Blowout* with John Travolta. We saw him in the arcade, and Sam came over and challenged him. He didn't really want to play. Sam's like, 'Come on, come on, let's go.' Sam beat the s--- out of him in the game, and DePalma just walked away. So that was pretty fun."

***Bruce Campbell has a long history in filmmaking to reminisce about and share, including this memory of a particularly amusing arcade night with Sam Raimi and Brian DePalma. For more from our conversation with Campbell, check out our full rapid-fire interview at GameInformer.com*** ■



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